



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 31 JAN 2022

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Expected heavy snow mountain passes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/heavy-snow-expected-for-cascade-mountain-passes/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/heavy-snow-expected-for-cascade-mountain-passes/</a>
GIST	<p>Travelers heading through the Cascade mountain passes should prepare for heavy snow beginning Sunday evening and continuing to fall until Monday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>Additional snow accumulations from 8 inches to 2 feet are forecast in the central Cascades, including Stevens and Snoqualmie passes. A winter storm warning is in effect until 4 p.m. Monday for the Cascade mountains and valleys of Snohomish and King counties.</p> <p>Areas below 1,000 feet should expect rain, weather service meteorologist Carly Kovacik said Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Transportation <a href="#">required chains on all vehicles except all-wheel-drive vehicles</a> on Interstate 90 through Snoqualmie Pass, as of 4:30 p.m. Sunday, Officials <a href="#">advised motorists to use traction tires on Highway 2 through Stevens Pass</a>. Oversize vehicles were prohibited through both passes.</p> <p>Kovacik said heavy snow should start falling by late Sunday evening.</p> <p>“That is when we start to see the impactful snow accumulation begin,” she said.</p> <p>In the Seattle area, “hit-or-miss showers” are forecast throughout the week, with the possibility of some flurries and light snow Wednesday morning across the Puget Sound region, Kovacik said. Temperatures are expected to remain in the mid-30s to upper 40s.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 World cases drop 3%, deaths climb 14%</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/01/30/bcworld-covid-19-cases-drop-3-russia-brazil-japan-records/4051643552207/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/01/30/bcworld-covid-19-cases-drop-3-russia-brazil-japan-records/4051643552207/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 30 (UPI) -- COVID-19 cases decreased 3% in one week though five nations -- Brazil, Russia, Germany, Turkey and Japan -- set national daily records in the past few days amid the global spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant. And deaths, which lag weeks after infections, climbed 14% from seven days ago.</p> <p>In one week, infections rose 22,377,927 for a total of 375,068,558 Sunday, according to tracking by Worldometers.info with an increase of 8% a week earlier. Cases hit a daily record of 3,779,047 Jan. 20, and it dropped Saturday to 2,658,117 and 2,084,703 Sunday as the strain has become the dominant one</p>

globally. On Dec. 13, it was down to 480,954. During the height of the Delta variant spike, cases reached 904,084 on April 29.

Deaths went up 62,921 in the past week for a toll of 5,681,423. The previous seven days the rise was 7% with 7,691 Saturday then 5,755 Sunday, far below the record of 17,518 one year ago in late January.

Daily records were broken in large nations spread out in Asia, Europe and South America two months after the variant was first detected by scientists in South Africa. And they have also surged in North America and Oceania.

On Sunday, Russia reported a record 121,288 cases with a one-week increase of 111% at 570,793 and a total of sixth at 11,737,007. Russia's population is 146.0 million.

On Saturday, Turkey, with 85.8 million residents, posted a record 94,783 cases and Japan, with 125.9 million, added a record 84,933. Turkey's infections rose 16% at 556,850 for a total of seventh at 11,438,476, including 88,145 Sunday. Japan went up 84% at 435,375 for a total of 3,683,648, including 78,128 Sunday. On Nov. 22 there were only 50 cases in Japan.

On Friday, Brazil, which has 214.9 million residents, added a record 257,239, then 104,012 Sunday, rising 31% in a week at 1,287,270 and a total of 25,351,489 in third place behind the United States at 75,578,076 and India at 41,092,522.

Germany also Friday set a record with 189,634 with a 47% rise at 1,025,754 and 10th overall at 9,760,540, including 103,341 Sunday. Germany has a population of 84.2 million people.

India's cases decreased 12% one week at 1,855,258 after rising 33% with 234,281 Sunday. One Sunday ago, the nation, with the second-largest population at 1.4 billion, climbed 333,533. India's daily cases increase was below the record 401,078, which was the highest in the world until the Omicron spike with the U.S., at 334.0 million people, holding the mark with 897,624 on Jan. 7.

Other nations with recent daily cases records include France at 501,635 (population 65.5 million), Italy at 228,1279 (60.3 million), Britain at 218,724 (population 68.4 million), Spain at 161,688 (46.8 million), Australia at 153,968 (58.8 million), Argentina at 134,439 (45.8 million), Israel 83,739 (9.3 million), Mexico 60,552 (131.0 million), Canada at 55,350 (38.2 million), Greece 50,126 (10.3 million).

Nations with weekly surges in deaths include Indonesia 274% and South Korea 122%.

But Indonesia, with 278 million people, has been relatively immune from the spike, rising only 47,310 cases in one week for a total of 4,343,185, including 12,422 Sunday with the record 56,715 in mid-July last year during the Delta surge.

The United States dominates other nations in deaths, 15,987 over one week and rising 10%.

The declining cases, coupled with fewer hospitalizations, are showing the worst of the Omicron surge may be over.

"Things are looking good," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Biden administration's top adviser on the pandemic, said a week ago. "We don't want to get overconfident, but they look like they're going in the right direction right now."

Vaccines have been shown to be effective against the strain, especially among people who have had boosters.

Three shots cut the risk of death from COVID-19 by 95% among those age 50 and older during the Omicron surge in Britain in an analysis by the United Kingdom Health Security Agenda.

In all, more than 10.1 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered, an increase of 190 million in one week with the world's population of 7.9 billion, according to Bloomberg tracking.

Broken down by world regions, the United States and Canada have administered at least one dose to 76% of the population, followed by Latin America at 74%, Asia-Pacific 73%, Europe at 67%, Middle East 52% and Africa at 15%, according to The New York Times tracking.

China, which has the world's largest population at 1.5 billion, had administered 3 billion doses, or 90.2% of the population for one shot, and ahead of India at 1.7 billion with 68.1% rate. The United States is third at 538.0 million and 74.5%.

Most nations in Europe are heavily vaccinated. In the European Union its 75%, including 86.8% in Spain, 83.2% in Denmark, 82.5% in France, 84% in Italy, 76.9% in Netherlands, 75.8% in Austria, 75.7% in Germany. Britain, which has left the EU, has a 78% rate.

Russia is lagging the world in vaccination with 52.3% of its population with at least one dose of a domestic-produced vaccine, including Sputnik 5.

Two other Eastern European nations have low vaccination rates: Ukraine at 36.9% and Romania at 41.9%. Poland's rate is 58.7% and Czech Republic's is 64.7%.

In Europe, cases rose 11% over seven days, one week after 15%, with a world-high 10,469,487 for 124,664,941 in first place among continents. Deaths decreased 0.5%, after a 4% decrease to a total of 1,614,034, also in first place.

France reported the second-most in the world in the past week, 2,417,807, behind the United States with 3,361,740 but decreased 3%. France's 19,058,890 cases are fourth.

France has the worst infection rate among large nations: 287,149 per million with the world at 47,949. Britain is at 239,687 and United States at 225,915. Israel's rate is 295,843.

France's daily record until the spike was 83,324 in early November 2020. Sunday's increase was 249,448.

France is 12th in deaths at 130,583, including 127 Sunday and 467 Tuesday, the most since mid-April 2021.

Vaccination will be necessary to events or travel on trains, as negative tests will no longer be accepted.

Later this week, most of the restrictions will end, including allowing full capacity at large events. Working from home requirements will end and masks won't be required outdoors.

Last week in England, Plan B restrictions ended. That includes working from home if possible, no mandatory masks in public or a vaccine pass to enter venues.

On Sunday, Britain began vaccinations for clinically vulnerable children 5 to 11.

Britain's deaths are 155,613 in seventh, including 296 Sunday with a 3% weekly drop. The kingdom added 439 deaths Tuesday, the most since late February with the record 1,824 in January one year ago.

Britain's cases decreased 10% with 72,727 Sunday for a total of 16,406,123 in fifth.

In Germany, cases surged early during the Omicron variant and they reached record levels last week. They rose 47% in one week.

The nation surpassed 100,000 two weeks ago. Until Nov. 4, the record was 32,546 on April 14.

Deaths dropped 6% in Germany.

On Dec. 24, Germany reported 575 deaths, the most since 589 on Feb. 16. Sunday's gain was 45 for 118,380 in 14th. Deaths are nowhere near the record of 1,249 on Dec. 29.

Germany remains under a nationwide lockdown for the unvaccinated, including nonessential services.

On Sunday, Russia reported 617 deaths, with the record 1,254 on Nov. 19, for a total of 330,728 in fourth place. Russia's deaths are down by 3%.

Russia two weeks ago went below 700 daily deaths for the first time since July.

In deaths elsewhere, Italy is ninth with 146,149, including 235 Sunday. In the top 20: Poland 15th with 105,161, rising by 23; Ukraine 16th with 100,125, including 94 more; and Spain 18th with 92,966 and no data on weekends.

Italy reported 104,065 infections Sunday. Until the recent spike, the record was 41,198 in November 2020.

On Monday, Italy will ease COVID-19 restrictions for all visitors from European Union countries. They only will need to display a "green pass" proving they have been vaccinated, recovered or tested negative recently.

Italy also has a "super green pass" requirement for anyone over the age of 12, including on the ski slopes. Required is a certified vaccination or proof of recovery and not merely a negative test.

Tuesday, exempt businesses include food shops, supermarkets, pharmacies, opticians, and stores selling fuel and animal food.

In Spain starting Tuesday, foreign travelers are required to present a vaccine certificate.

In other changes, the Netherlands is now allowing bars, restaurants, museums, theatres, and other cultural venues are to be allowed to re-open under conditions. On Tuesday, Denmark will end restrictions that had curfews for bars and restaurants and face mask mandates. And Austria's lockdown for unvaccinated residents ends Monday after it went into force in November.

In Asia over the past week, cases were up 5% with the total 99,772,684 and deaths increased 21% to 1,290,156.

India holds the world daily record for deaths, not including major reconciliations: 6,148 last June. The Delta variant emerged in India.

India's fatalities rose 41%, including 893 Sunday, the most since last early July. The total is 494,091 in third place.

"Now the cases of corona infection have also started decreasing, this is a very positive sign," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday, adding "about 60% of youth in the age group of 15 to 18 years have got their vaccines within three to four weeks. This will not only protect our youth but will also help them to continue with their studies."

India, which is the prime manufacturer of vaccines for the world, has a one-shot rate for the entire population of 68.1%.

On Sunday, Kerala went into total shutdown amid the rising COVID-19 cases in the state. Only shops selling essential items are allowed to open for 14 hours. Kerala is on India's tropical Malabar Coast with a population of 34.6 million people.

The pandemic began in late 2019 in Mainland China, but the nation's death toll has stood at 4,636 for 12 months and 84th behind Palestine at 4,818. China added 81 cases Sunday.

The Winter Olympics' opening ceremonies are Friday in Beijing.

The Olympics are taking place in a "closed loop" with 60,000 competitors, journalists and other officials cut off from others and being tested for COVID-19 every day.

On Sunday, 34 new COVID-19 infections were reported among Olympics-related personnel, including 13 athletes or officials arriving at the airport in Beijing, bringing the total to 139. Those traveling must come on charter flights.

Poland's short track medal hopeful Natalia Maliszewska and Austrian ski jumper Marita Kramer have tested positive.

Most Chinese people won't be able to attend the Olympics with foreigners also banned.

Japan, which hosted the Summer Olympics during the Delta surge, reported 31 deaths Sunday for a total of 18,780, rising 208 in a week for a 292% gain.

Japan has a relatively low 20,534 infections per million and its vaccination rate is 80.6%.

U.S. Forces Japan will lift restrictions on its personnel's activities outside bases in Japan on Tuesday as scheduled, Japan's Foreign Ministry said Friday.

In South Korea, U.S. military restrictions remain in place. That includes a ban on dining in at restaurants and visits to shopping malls with visits to Seoul limited to official duties and those who live in the capital city.

Cases are also surging in South Korea with a record 17,515 Saturday and a total of 828,637. The nation's 7,628 one Sunday ago were the second-highest after a record 7,843 on Dec. 15 with 2020's most 1,237 on Dec. 25. South Korea added 20 deaths Sunday after a record 109 on Dec. 23.

"We'll ultimately change the medical system to respond to COVID-19 within the everyday medical system rather than a separate, specialized medical system," Health Minister Kwon Deok-cheol said in a regular briefing on virus response last week.

"This is an inevitable transition to reduce severe cases and deaths by focusing on the swift diagnosis and treatment of high-risk groups with the limited resources available."

South Korea's vaccination rate is 86.2%.

Indonesia ranks eighth in the world at 144,303 with an increase of 18 deaths Sunday, and 79 in a week, way down from a record 2,069 on July 27. Indonesia has vaccinated 68.2% of its population with at least one dose.

Iran dropped to 11th behind Colombia at 132,424 deaths, including 44 Sunday. Iran's one-shot vaccination rate is 72.1%.

Turkey is 19th in deaths at 87,234 including 189 Sunday. Turkey has a 68.7% vaccination rate.

Israel has a death toll of 8,658 with 59 reported Sunday and 53,928 cases for a total of 2,759,031.

Amid spiking cases, Israel's hospital system is strained.

"Every day there are staff members who announce that they are sick," Wolfson Medical Center director Dr. Anat Engel in Tel Aviv told 103FM. "The loads are heavy. It's a combination of the morbidity that is rising because we see the amount [of] verified [cases] in the population, as well as the morbidity of staff, many of whom are in isolation."

Israel has lifted travel bans to destinations in Israel's list of "red" countries with high infection rates, including the United States, Britain and Canada. Instead, protocols are in place.

The CDC is advising against travel to Israel, rising it to "level four: very high." Other countries on the level four list include Canada, France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey and Britain.

In North America, the deaths are 1,317,356 with a 30% weekly decrease, and cases are 88,529,094, rising 15%.

The United States' deaths rose 10% and cases dropped 30%. On Sunday, the United States reported 329 deaths and 96,954 cases though more than two-thirds of states don't report data on weekends.

Mexico is fifth in the world in deaths at 305,893 with a weekly increase of 56% and 131 recorded on Sunday. The nation's cases decreased 5% with 13,926 most recently for 14th at 4,930,069.

Canada's cases dropped 24% in one week with 8,844 Sunday for 23rd in cases with 3,036,011.

Until the Omicron variant, the record was 11,383 one year ago Jan. 3.

Canada's deaths went up 10% and the nation ranks 27th worldwide with 33,722 including 75 on Sunday after 226 Wednesday, the most since a record 257 on Dec. 29, 2020.

Canada has around one-third the rates per million than the United States with deaths 879 and cases 79,113.

Canada has the best one-shot vaccination rate of the three largest countries in North America at 84.53%. The United States is at 74.5% for one shot. Mexico's percentage is 65.3%, though it was the first Latin American nation to begin vaccinating people.

On Monday, Ontario will allow restaurants, bars, gyms and movie theatres to reopen with 50% capacity. Larger venues will also be allowed to operate at half capacity or 500 people, whichever is less. Cinemas, sports facilities and other similar places still won't be allowed to serve food or drinks.

Though cases are dropping in Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam, the nation's chief public health officer, said last week severe illnesses are still surging with more than 10,800 people with COVID-19 being treated in the country's hospitals each day, including more than 1,200 patients in intensive care.

In Mexico, 45% of hospital beds nationwide are occupied. The rate in the United States is 77.69% for all patients, including 17.9% for coronavirus.

In South America, cases decreased 2% in one week with a total of 48,408,787 and deaths were up 56% to 1,214,468.

Brazil reported 280 deaths Sunday and 695 Saturday, the most since late September, with the record 4,211 in early April.

Also in the top 10 for deaths, Peru is sixth at 205,505. Colombia is 10th at 134,079, Argentina is 13th with 120,988 and Chile 23rd with 39,684.

On Sunday, Peru added 158 deaths, Colombia 247, Argentina 179 and Chile 31. These numbers are way down from records: Peru with 1,154, Colombia with 754, Argentina with 791, Chile with 316.

Argentina posted 21,570 infections Sunday.

Peru has the world's highest death rate at 6,087 per million people.

Some South American nations have high vaccination rates. Chile has the best vaccination rate on the continent at 90.5% with Argentina 86.5%, Brazil at 80.2%, Colombia at 79.6% and Peru 74.9%.

Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo Carnival festivities have been postponed to April 21 from Feb. 25 to March 2 in a joint announcement Friday.

Like South America, it's summer in Oceania.

Australia had largely avoided mass infections until the Omicron surge, with only 2,688 as of Oct. 14. The nation reported 37,834 more cases Sunday, about one-quarter of the record recently.

Overall, the nation has climbed to 28th with 2,511,383. Deaths are 3,716, including 85 more Sunday and 569 in one week for a 32% gain. On Friday, it set a daily record with 134, with the previous mark before Omicron 59 in early September 2020.

Students are scheduled to return to classrooms this week after the break. Staff and students in New South Wales and Victorian states will receive twice-weekly rapid testing for the first four weeks of term.

Australia has vaccinated 84.2% of its population with at least one dose.

In Oceania, cases decreased 23% for a total of 2,696,835 and deaths were up 29% for a total of 6,095.

New Zealand's deaths remained at 52 total and the nation added 140 cases Sunday with its record of 222 on Nov. 16.

New Zealand, which has an 81.8% vaccination rate, is on a traffic light system. Last Sunday everywhere went into Red, meaning everyone will be required to wear masks in public venues and on public transportation. Customers are limited and events have been called off because of participation curbs.

Guam, a U.S. territory of fewer than 200,000 people, reported a record 850 cases Tuesday though 8.48% of its eligible population of 5 and older is fully vaccinated.

Though the variant emerged in Africa, the continent's situation has stabilized with a 9% weekly cases drop after 52% six weeks ago with a total of 10,995,496. Deaths went up 0.5% for a total toll of 239,299.

South Africa's infections decreased by 3% and deaths rose 7%. The Omicron variant was first reported on Nov. 24.

Overall, South Africa has reported 3,603,856 cases, in 19th worldwide, with 2,226 Sunday. Seven weeks ago there was a record 37,875

The nation is 17th in deaths at 95,022, including 117 Sunday.

"I think we should draw comfort from the fact that this has been the least severe wave in the country," Shabir Madhi, a vaccinologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, told NPR.

"We've come to a point where at least three-quarters -- and now after Omicron, probably 80% -- of South Africans have developed immunity and at least protection against severe disease and death."

South Africa's vaccination rate is only 32.8%.

Tunisia has the second-most deaths with 26,229 ahead of Egypt with 22,604.



HEADLINE	<b>01/31 US prepared to sanction Russia elites</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-prepared-sanction-russian-elites-close-putin-if-russia-invades-ukraine-2022-01-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-prepared-sanction-russian-elites-close-putin-if-russia-invades-ukraine-2022-01-31/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Jan 31 (Reuters) - The United States and its allies have prepared a list of Russian elites in or near Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle to hit with economic sanctions should Russia invade Ukraine, a senior administration official said on Monday.</p> <p>"The individuals we have identified are in or near the inner circles of the Kremlin and play a role in government decision making or are at a minimum complicit in the Kremlin's destabilizing behavior," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.</p> <p>The United States has developed specific sanctions packages for both Russian elites who meet the criteria and their family members, and these efforts are being pursued in coordination with U.S. allies and partners, the official said.</p> <p>Targeting Russian oligarchs is only one part of a plan by the United States and its allies to punish Putin should he launch an invasion of Ukraine after massing tens of thousands of troops on the Ukraine border. Russia denies that it plans to invade Ukraine.</p> <p>President Joe Biden has not ruled out putting sanctions on Putin himself.</p> <p>U.S. officials have already detailed other penalties that include sanctions on Russian financial institutions and export control measures that could attempt to choke off broad swaths of industrial and consumer technologies to Russia.</p> <p>The official would not provide names of Russian figures who could be sanctioned.</p> <p>"There is a broad list of individuals we can pull from," the official said, noting that some will be from a classified list of senior Russian political figures and oligarchs outlined in Section 241 of the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" in a report sent to the U.S. Congress in 2018.</p> <p>"We cannot disclose the contents of this list or name specific names given flight risks, but it provides ample targets and family networks involved in stashing their assets," the official said.</p> <p>The official said many of the individuals are particularly vulnerable targets because of deepened financial ties with the West.</p> <p>"Putin's cronies will no longer be able to use their spouses or other family members as proxies to evade sanctions. Sanctions would cut them off from the international financial system and ensure that they and their family members will no longer be able to enjoy the perks of parking their money in the West and attending elite Western universities," the official added.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Covid cases rise Olympic athletes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-37-new-covid-19-cases-among-olympics-personnel-jan-30-2022-01-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-37-new-covid-19-cases-among-olympics-personnel-jan-30-2022-01-31/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Jan 31 (Reuters) - During the past four days China has detected some 119 cases of COVID-19 among athletes and personnel linked to the Beijing Winter Olympics, with authorities imposing a "closed loop" bubble to keep participants, staff and media separated from the public.</p> <p>The tally from the weekend showed 37 new cases on Sunday, and 34 on Saturday, with most testing positive after arrival at the airport, Games organisers said.</p>

On Monday, Russian biathlete Valeria Vasnetsova said her own Olympic ambitions were over after testing positive twice following her arrival in Beijing, one of three Russian positive tests announced on Monday.

"Unfortunately my Olympic dream will remain just a dream," Vasnetsova wrote on social media. "Maybe one day I will find the strength to rise again but it will be a completely different story."

Eight athletes or team officials were among 28 people who had tested positive on arrival at the airport on Sunday.

International Olympic Committee member Emma Terho, who heads the IOC's athletes commission, also tested positive and said she has been in isolation since the weekend.

"Even though this is not the start I envisaged, I was happy to see the protocols that Beijing 2022 has put in place are working well," Terho, a retired Finnish ice hockey player, said on social media.

Some 3,000 athletes, along with coaches, officials, referees, federation delegates and media are expected for the Games, due to run from Feb. 4-20.

The "closed loop" will allow them to move between accommodation and Olympic venues on official transport but they are not allowed out to move freely in public.

In contrast to many countries seeking to live with COVID-19, China has isolated itself with a zero-tolerance policy, cancelling nearly all international flights.

An opinion piece in the People's Daily -- the ruling Communist Party's official newspaper -- praised the work done to prepare for the Games and battle the spread of the virus.

"The epidemic and control measures of the Beijing Winter Olympics are the epitome of China's successful experience in fighting the epidemic, and are also a focused demonstration of China's spirit and China's strength."

Olympic athletes and others must fly directly into the city on charter flights and are tested daily.

## POSITIVE TESTS

Athletes, however, have also been testing positive prior to their arrival in Beijing, with the world's leading women's ski jumper, Marita Kramer of Austria, rescheduling her departure in an effort to get healthy in time for her competition.

Kramer, who leads the women's overall World Cup standings, tested positive in Germany, the last competition ahead of the Games.

"Officials are at the moment working on a time plan in order to make it possible for the World Cup leader to take part in the Olympic Games in Beijing," the Austrian ski federation said.

Russian skeleton racers, Olympic silver medallist Nikita Tregubov and Vladislav Semyonov, will miss the Games after testing positive prior to their departure, the country's bobsleigh federation said.

There was, however, good news for the Australian curling team after curler Tahli Gill returned two negative tests following an initial positive in the Chinese capital on Sunday.

Gill and teammate Dean Hewitt had been in isolation for two days after she tested positive at Beijing airport.

	"We have treated this time as a rest day and a time to really focus on our Olympic goals," the pair said in a statement.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Diabetes deaths top 100,000 2<sup>nd</sup> year</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-us-diabetes-deaths-top-100000-second-straight-year-federal-panel-urges-2022-01-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-us-diabetes-deaths-top-100000-second-straight-year-federal-panel-urges-2022-01-31/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan 31 (Reuters) - More than 100,000 Americans died from diabetes in 2021, marking the second consecutive year for that grim milestone and spurring a call for a federal mobilization similar to the fight against HIV/AIDS.</p> <p>The new figures come as an expert panel urges Congress to overhaul diabetes care and prevention, including recommendations to move beyond a reliance on medical interventions alone. A report released earlier this month calls for far broader policy changes to stem the diabetes epidemic, such as promoting consumption of healthier foods, ensuring paid maternal leave from the workplace, levying taxes on sugary drinks and expanding access to affordable housing, among other areas.</p> <p>In 2019, diabetes was the seventh-leading cause of death in America and claimed more than 87,000 lives, reflecting a long-running failure to address the illness and leaving many more vulnerable when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, creating new hurdles to accessing care.</p> <p>Since then, the nation's toll from diabetes has increased sharply, surpassing 100,000 deaths in each of the last two years and representing a new record-high level, according to a Reuters analysis of provisional death data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Diabetes-related deaths surged 17% in 2020 and 15% in 2021 compared to the prepandemic level in 2019. That excluded deaths directly attributed to COVID-19. The CDC concurred with the Reuters analysis and said additional deaths from 2021 are still being tallied.</p> <p>"The large number of diabetes deaths for a second year in a row is certainly a cause for alarm," said Dr. Paul Hsu, an epidemiologist at UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health. "Type 2 diabetes itself is relatively preventable, so it's even more tragic that so many deaths are occurring."</p> <p>In a new report, the National Clinical Care Commission created by Congress said that the United States must adopt a more comprehensive approach to prevent more people from developing type 2 diabetes, the most common form, and to help people who are already diagnosed avoid life-threatening complications. About 37 million Americans, or 11% of the population, have diabetes, and one in three Americans will develop the chronic disease in their lifetime if current trends persist, according to the commission.</p> <p>"Diabetes in the U.S. cannot simply be viewed as a medical or health care problem, but also must be addressed as a societal problem that cuts across many sectors, including food, housing, commerce, transportation and the environment," the commission wrote in its Jan. 5 report to Congress and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).</p> <p>The federal panel recommended Congress create an Office of National Diabetes Policy that would coordinate efforts across the government and oversee changes outside health policy. It would be separate from HHS and could be similar to the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, according to Dr. William Herman, commission chairman and a professor of internal medicine and epidemiology at the University of Michigan.</p> <p>"We aren't going to cure the problem of diabetes in the United States with medical interventions," Herman told Reuters. "The idea is to pull something together across federal agencies, so they are systematically talking to one another."</p> <p>U.S. Senator Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington who chairs the Senate health committee, helped create the commission in 2017 and said she is studying the recommendations closely.</p>

"People with diabetes and other chronic illnesses were already facing challenges well before the pandemic hit, and COVID has only made these problems worse," Murray said in a statement to Reuters. "It is absolutely crucial to research and find solutions to better support diabetes patients and get them the care they need."

#### MORE CASES, WORSE PROGNOSIS

As Reuters reported last year in a series, diabetes represents a major public health failure in the United States. The number of Americans with the disease has exploded in recent decades, and their prognosis has worsened, even though spending on new treatments has soared.

The pandemic has proven especially deadly for people with diabetes. People with poorly controlled diabetes have at least a two-fold greater risk of death from COVID-19, according to the report. And diabetes and its complications are more common in low-income Americans and people of color, longstanding disparities that were further exposed during the pandemic.

Dr. Shari Bolen, a commission member and an associate professor of medicine at Case Western Reserve University and the MetroHealth System in Cleveland, said the staggering number of diabetes deaths is "disheartening but also a call to action."

The federal panel's report marked the first such review on diabetes since 1975. During that time, the prevalence of diabetes among U.S. adults has increased from 5.3% in the late 1970s to 14.3% in 2018, it said. Direct medical costs related to diabetes were \$237 billion in 2017, and there was an estimated \$90 billion lost to lower productivity in the United States.

High costs for doctor's visits, medications and supplies force many diabetes patients to forgo or delay routine care. Many patients and U.S. lawmakers have expressed outrage at the rising price of insulin, which type 1 diabetes patients must take their entire lives and which is sometimes required to keep type 2 patients' disease under control. The commission endorsed proposals such as capping insulin price increases to the rate of inflation and government negotiation of drug prices.

Murray and other lawmakers have pushed for a provision in the Biden administration's proposed Build Back Better legislation that would cap the cost of insulin at \$35 for many patients.

To further ease financial barriers, the panel recommended that patients' out-of-pocket costs be waived for other "high-value" treatments, including certain diabetes drugs, continuous glucose monitors, basic supplies and diabetes education.

The commission also highlighted the risks of overtreatment in older adults with type 2 diabetes. Reuters wrote about that risk in November and how a drug industry campaign for an aggressive treatment target led to an epidemic of potentially lethal incidents of low blood sugar, or hypoglycemia. The panel asked federal health officials to track overtreatment among Medicare patients to "reduce the incidence of severe hypoglycemia and improve patient safety."

The commission said the United States should better promote the purchase of fruits and vegetables in food assistance programs and ensure mothers have paid family leave to aid breastfeeding, which can help reduce the risk of diabetes in mothers and is associated with a reduced risk of obesity and diabetes in children. The panel also recommended imposing taxes on sugary drinks that would raise their shelf price by 10% to 20% and using the revenue to expand access to clean drinking water and fund similar programs.

HHS deferred comment to Herman. In a statement, the CDC said the report's recommendations offer a detailed roadmap to "addressing rising health-care costs attributed to diabetes, and reducing racial, ethnic, and income-related disparities in diabetes outcomes."

HEADLINE	<b>01/31 UK threatens Russia sanctions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/britain-warns-russia-sanctions-kremlin-linked-people-businesses-2022-01-31/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/britain-warns-russia-sanctions-kremlin-linked-people-businesses-2022-01-31/</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON/MOSCOW, Jan 31 (Reuters) - Britain said on Monday it would impose sanctions on companies and people with the closest links to the Kremlin if Russia takes action against Ukraine, drawing a warning from Moscow that it would respond if its businesses were "attacked".</p> <p>Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, London has become the pre-eminent global centre for a vast outflow of money from former Soviet republics.</p> <p>Opponents of President Vladimir Putin, who has massed troops near Ukraine, have repeatedly called on the West to get tough on Russian money, though oligarchs and Russian officials continue to flaunt their wealth at Europe's most luxurious destinations.</p> <p>"We are very clear that if Russia takes further action against the Ukraine, then we will further tighten the sanctions regime targeting those businesses and people with the closest links to the Kremlin," Simon Clarke, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, told Sky News.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the threat of sanctions would amount to an attack on Russian businesses. He said such actions would backfire by hurting British companies and warned that Russia would respond.</p> <p>The United States, the European Union and Britain have warned Putin against attacking Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia denies planning to attack Ukraine and is demanding security guarantees including a promise by NATO never to let Kyiv join the alliance. Russian officials say the West is gripped by Russophobia and has no right to lecture Moscow on how to act after NATO's eastward expansion since the Cold War ended.</p> <p>The British government will introduce new legislation this week to broaden the scope of sanctions it can apply to Russia to try to deter aggression towards Ukraine, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said on Sunday.</p> <p>On the sanctions list are six people Britain says are close to Putin: businessmen Yuri Kovalchuk, Arkady Rotenberg and Nikolai Shamalov, former KGB officer Sergei Chemezov, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Federal Security Service (FSB) chief Alexander Bortnikov.</p> <p>The sanctions allow Britain to freeze individual assets and ban individual from entering the United Kingdom.</p> <p>They also prohibit any individual from dealing with a post-2014 transferable security or money market instrument of a maturity over 30 days issued by Sberbank, VTB bank, Gazprombank, Vnesheconombank (VEB), Rosselkhozbank, OPK Oboronprom, United Aircraft Corporation, Uralvagonzavod, Rosneft, Transneft or Gazprom Neft.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Most of free Covid tests made in China</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/china-covid-tests/2022/01/30/id/1054692/">https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/china-covid-tests/2022/01/30/id/1054692/</a>
GIST	<p>Many of the free COVID-19 at-home test kits mailed to Americans this week by the Biden administration are made in China, according to The Epoch Times.</p> <p>The testing kits sourced from iHealth Labs, a California subsidiary of Chinese medical gear manufacturer Andon Health, have a "made in China" label sticker.</p> <p>According to the company's filings and federal contract records, Andon Health has won contracts with the U.S. federal and some state governments worth over \$2.1 billion. Approximately \$1.8 billion came from</p>

the Defense Department for the White House testing initiative. The Defense Department awarded the lab two contracts this month to help distribute over 354 million testing kits to homes throughout the country.

President Joe Biden last month announced that his administration would purchase 500 million COVID-19 tests to ship to Americans free of charge. The White House on Friday said 60 million U.S. households so far have ordered free tests since the website used to distribute them launched just over a week ago.

This is not the first time throughout the pandemic that supplies for the coronavirus were Chinese-made. Members of the House of Representatives were given KN95 masks earlier this month which had "made in China" stamped on the side."

Lawmakers were unhappy with the idea of coronavirus supplies made in China, the virus's country of origin.

House GOP Doctors Caucus chairman Brad Wenstrup, R-Ohio, told Fox News that "the fact that the masks we are mandated to wear in the U.S. Congress are made in China is just one example of our inability to protect and treat Americans without relying on adversaries. These Chinese masks further highlight our need to divest away from the [Chinese Communist Party]. Our national security and our health depend on it."

Rep. Greg Murphy, R-N.C., slammed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for failing "to recognize the senseless optics of her own decision-making.

"We are fighting a virus that came from China, yet the Speaker is comfortable with publicly supporting a Chinese manufacturer, sending our taxpayer dollars overseas and further advertising our dependency on China ... on the faces of Congress. Either Pelosi's office neglected to realize the cruel irony of supporting 'Made in China' or they don't care.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Celebrations muted for Year of the Tiger</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-beijing-c5ccc36766d77ae106931e1f6568106a">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-beijing-c5ccc36766d77ae106931e1f6568106a</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — People across Asia prepared Monday for muted Lunar New Year celebrations amid concerns over the coronavirus and virulent omicron variant, even as increasing vaccination rates raised hopes that the Year of the Tiger might bring life back closer to normal.</p> <p>The Lunar New Year is the most important annual holiday in China and falls on Tuesday, Feb. 1. Each year is named after one of twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac in a repeating cycle. The Year of the Tiger follows the Year of the Ox.</p> <p>This will be the third new year in a row celebrated in the shadow of the pandemic. It was two days before the holiday in 2020 that China locked down Wuhan — a city of 11 million people — following the detection of the coronavirus there.</p> <p>Some 85% of Chinese are now fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data, and more Chinese have been traveling domestically this year, despite government warnings. Many people prepare to celebrate by buying red lanterns and other decorations for their homes, and food to mark the beginning of a new year.</p> <p>Still, 63-year-old retiree Huang Ping lamented as he shopped at a Beijing flower market that the new year's "atmosphere has faded" with the closure of temples and seasonal fairs to prevent large crowds. He said he hoped for better times soon.</p> <p>"I wish for the epidemic to pass as early as possible and for the economy to recover as well," he said.</p> <p>Another retiree, Han Guiha, said he was planning on making the best of the situation.</p>

“I’ll stay at home enjoying good food and wine,” the 62-year-old said. “I will make my house clean and beautiful. Right now the virus is spreading and we need to be careful.”

Some 260 million people traveled in China in the first 10 days of the holiday rush starting Jan. 17 — fewer than before the pandemic but up 46% over last year. Overall, the government forecasts 1.2 billion trips during the holiday season, up 36% from a year ago.

This year the celebrations coincide with the Beijing Winter Olympics, which open near the end of the weeklong holiday. The Chinese capital has been tightening controls to contain coronavirus outbreaks ahead of the sporting event.

The Games are being held inside sealed-off “bubbles,” and organizers have announced that no tickets will be sold to the general public and only selected spectators will be allowed.

“I’ll watch the games with my kid, but of course on TV,” said Wang Zhuo, a retail manager from Beijing.

In Hong Kong, which saw a surge in cases in January, people wore surgical masks as they shopped for red and tiger-themed holiday items. The city has closed schools because of the outbreaks and required restaurants to close at 6 p.m., forcing many to dine at home for traditional New Year’s Eve family dinners.

With the Year of the Tiger, many are hoping the traditional powers attributed to the animal will help put the country on a path out of the pandemic, said Chen Lianshan, a Beijing university expert on Chinese folklore.

“The tiger is a protection against evil spirits and it can defeat demons and ghosts of all kinds, and the Chinese believe that the plague is one kind of an evil spirit,” he said.

Elsewhere in Asia, there were signs that celebrations might not be as subdued as they were last year. Despite ongoing pandemic restrictions, most people are now vaccinated with at least two shots in many of the region’s countries.

In the old quarter of Hanoi, people flocked on the weekend to the traditional market to get decorations and flowers for the festival, known as Tet in Vietnam.

Vietnam’s daily case count remains at about 15,000 new infections but its low hospitalization and death rate has allowed the country to reopen for business and cautiously resume social activities.

More than 70% of Vietnamese are fully vaccinated, and 80% have had at least one shot, according to Our World in Data.

Still, the country has cancelled Tet fireworks and other large events to minimize risks this year.

In Thailand, where 69% of people are fully vaccinated, Bangkok decided this year not to hold traditional Lunar New Year celebrations in Chinatown for the second year in a row, but was going ahead with lighting seasonal lanterns on the district’s main street.

In Singapore, Lunar New Year celebrations are more subdued due to coronavirus restrictions that allow residents to receive only five unique visitors a day, and preferably only one visit daily. The rules are likely to get in the way of the tradition of visiting relatives during the holiday.

“This year it will be rather quiet, as people are spacing out visiting over the next two weeks instead of on the first or second day of the new year,” said Sebastian Lim, a Singapore resident.

Business was brisk at a flower market in the Taiwanese capital of Taipei on Monday as people made last minute purchases. Some 73% of Taiwanese are fully vaccinated.



	<p>“The pandemic is surely affecting it a bit, but people still like flowers, so they come out and buy flowers,” said one shopkeeper, who only gave his name as Lee.</p> <p>“But prices are lower because we have overproduction and we can’t export some items — this is our biggest problem.”</p> <p>Ethnic Chinese shopkeepers in Myanmar face a bigger dilemma, as the new year coincides with the one-year anniversary of the military’s seizure of power from the democratically-elected government.</p> <p>Supporters of the growing anti-military movement have called for people to close their shops and businesses in a nationwide “silent strike” protest. Military leaders have warned that anyone who participates could face legal action, including charges of violating the country’s counter-terrorism law.</p> <p>But that has left shopkeepers who had planned to close anyway for the Lunar New Year to spend time with their families wondering what to do.</p> <p>“Normally we are closed during Chinese new year, but don’t know what to do this year,” said Hu, a noodle vendor in Yangon who wouldn’t give his full name out of fear of reprisal. “We want to close, but we have to be afraid of the authorities.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Border Patrol spat amid DHS chief visit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/politics/border-patrol-spat-during-mayorkas-visit-latest-tension-with-biden-admin">https://www.foxnews.com/politics/border-patrol-spat-during-mayorkas-visit-latest-tension-with-biden-admin</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">A spat between Border Patrol agents</a> and their chief during a visit by <a href="#">Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas</a> is the latest sign of tensions between agents and the Biden administration -- whose policies many agents believe are stopping them from keeping the border secure.</p> <p>U.S. <a href="#">Border Patrol</a> Chief Raul Ortiz was involved in a tense back and forth with <a href="#">agents</a> in Laredo, Texas, Friday, as Mayorkas visited the area. In video shared with Fox News by a Border Patrol source, Ortiz confirmed that "morale is at an all-time low."</p> <p>Ortiz acknowledged agents’ frustration, with Mayorkas in the room.</p> <p>"I get it," Ortiz said. "You come to work, you’re frustrated. You’re upset because you didn’t get the desired outcome that you want. Doesn’t mean you give up."</p> <p>As the conversation continued Other agents chimed in that "you keep releasing criminal aliens into the country."</p> <p>With the agents seemingly still not satisfied with the answers they were getting, Ortiz asked them, "Why are you guys getting caught up in semantics? ... I’ve been doing this job as long as y’all."</p> <p>"That’s the problem, chief," one agent interjected. "For evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. That’s exactly what’s happening here. Good men are doing nothing. You’re allowing illegal aliens to be dropped off in communities."</p> <p>Mayorkas appeared to make reference to the exchange in a tweet in which he said that "Challenges and frustrations voiced, solutions proposed, honor and duty to mission paramount."</p> <p>The video drew astonishment from Mayorkas’ predecessor, who called the exchange "remarkable."</p> <p>"I've never seen anything like that where Border Patrol agents are pushing back so aggressively on their leadership," former acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf said on "Cavuto Live."</p>



"And I think what is probably most striking from that video, which is if you can see in the background the DHS secretary is standing right there, he does not step up. He does not address any of these concerns from the Border Patrol agents. There's no vision," he said. "There's no leadership. He just stands to the side because he knows he cannot talk to these agents and defend what is going down on the border because of the policies of this administration."

The exchange came a day after [Townhall obtained audio of Mayorkas' remarks to agents](#) in the Yuma sector, in which an agent [reportedly turned his back](#) on the secretary after accusing him of not allowing them to do their jobs.

Another agent reportedly pressed Mayorkas on how agents are unable to patrol the border due to the policies of the Biden administration, while another reportedly said that Yuma was better under President Donald Trump as "everyone was doing their jobs."

"The job has not gotten any easier over the last few months, and it was very, very difficult throughout 2021," Mayorkas told the agents, according to Townhall. "I know apprehending families and kids is not what you signed up to do. And now we got a composition that is changing even more with Cubans, Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and the like, it just gets more difficult,"

"I know the policies of this administration are not particularly popular with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, but that's the reality, and let's see what we can do within that framework," Mayorkas added.

As for the agent who turned his back on him, Mayorkas reportedly told the agent, "You can turn your back on me, but I won't turn my back on you."

A DHS spokesperson told Fox News that Mayorkas had invited frank discussion, that the point of his trip was to hear from agents unfiltered and that had a number of constructive discussions already on the three-day trip to the area.

"Secretary Mayorkas's priority for this trip is to meet directly with the workforce to hear about their experiences and address their needs," a spokesperson said in a statement.

"Border Patrol Agents are dedicated to their mission, and demonstrate tremendous bravery and life-saving skills in the performance of their duties. Secretary Mayorkas welcomes candor during these conversations, and appreciates and respects the opinions of each member of the CBP workforce," they said.

That was not the first time audio has been leaked from private meetings between Mayorkas and the men and women who serve on the frontlines of the crisis at the southern border.

In August, [Fox News obtained audio in which Mayorkas](#) admitted that the border crisis was "unsustainable" and "we're going to lose" if "borders are the first line of defense."

"A couple of days ago I was down in Mexico, and I said look, you know, if, if our borders are the first line of defense, we're going to lose and this is unsustainable," Mayorkas said Thursday, according to the audio. "We can't continue like this, our people in the field can't continue and our system isn't built for it."

At that point, agents expressed exasperation to the DHS chief.

"For those of us who have been around here long enough ... we don't need to reinvent the wheel," one agent told Mayorkas. "We've had this happen before. We know exactly how to shut it down. We need to make illegal entry illegal."

Mayorkas was unlikely to have ingratiated himself with agents a month later in September when he fueled a narrative that border agents on horseback "whipped" Haitian migrants -- a claim that was quickly debunked.

Mayorkas, unlike President Biden, did not explicitly [endorse the whipping narrative](#), but said that the conduct was "horrifying" and "do not reflect who we are, who we aspire to be for the integrity and values of our truly heroic personnel in the Department of Homeland Security."

"We know that those images painfully conjured up the worst elements of our nation's ongoing battle against systemic racism," he said.

An investigation was also launched into the agents' behavior, which Mayorkas suggested would be wrapped up quickly. However, it is currently still ongoing.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Living with Covid: new normal?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/living-with-covid-new-normal/">https://www.wired.com/story/living-with-covid-new-normal/</a>
GIST	<p><b>SINCE JANUARY 27</b>, England has dropped pretty much all its measures against <a href="#">Covid-19</a>. Any person can saunter into any shop without a mask; work-from-home guidance has been scrapped; and all needs for a vaccine passport have been squashed. England will be the <a href="#">"most open country in Europe."</a> proclaimed health and social care secretary Sajid Javid.</p> <p>And other European countries are following suit. Ireland has dropped <a href="#">almost all</a> its restrictions, bar mask requirements. <a href="#">Denmark</a> is also eliminating all measures beginning February 1, except for testing on arrival from abroad. Other Nordic countries have <a href="#">signaled</a> they will also do the same in the coming weeks. The Spanish government is <a href="#">urging</a> European countries to consider the possibility that Covid-19 can now be treated as <a href="#">an endemic disease</a>—a permanent fixture in our lives.</p> <p>Despite towering case numbers for <a href="#">Omicron</a>, these parts of the world are beginning to declare—arguably prematurely—that the worst of the pandemic is behind them. It's time to get on with it, to learn to live with Covid, they say. The World Health Organization has <a href="#">warned</a> that new variants are likely to emerge and that the pandemic is nowhere near over. But a wise decision or not, it's happening.</p> <p>Now what? Stuck at home for the past two years, our social skills have decayed, we've outgrown our jeans, and we've developed an unrelenting suspicion for every cough and sneeze. But now, suddenly, we've been set free, urged to dive back into a Wild West revision of the new normal. How will we cope? And what wounds will we be carrying?</p> <p>George Bonanno, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University, reckons most people will welcome the return to normal (or some semblance of the previous normality). "I think people are really ready to move out from under the shadow of this thing," he says. In his book, <i>The End of Trauma</i>, he makes the case that humans are more resilient than we give ourselves credit for. While some have dubbed the pandemic a <a href="#">"collective mass trauma event"</a>, Bonanno chafes at this term. A traumatic event is <a href="#">defined</a> as one that is unexpected and violent or life-threatening. "When people start talking about collective trauma, they get into the illusion of some sort of medical diagnostic thing, and that's just wrong." The abundant overuse of the word "trauma" in casual references means the word is losing some of its clinical weight, not least in the case of the pandemic, he thinks.</p> <p>But for some, it has certainly been traumatic. Health care workers, who have borne the brunt of caring for patients and seeing them suffer and die, and have worked unrelentingly long hours in difficult conditions for the past two years, are reporting record levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental health condition triggered by a traumatic experience, with symptoms including flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, and nightmares. According to <a href="#">modeling</a> from the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the United Kingdom, 40 percent of intensive care staff have symptoms of PTSD, as well as 35 percent of Covid patients who have been ventilated.</p> <p>To gauge the coming mental fallout from the pandemic, other epidemics may serve as models. <a href="#">One study</a> conducted in Hong Kong looked at chronic PTSD rates among survivors of SARS, two and a half years after the 2003 epidemic. Almost half had PTSD at some point after the outbreak, and over a quarter</p>

were still suffering with it after 30 months. Another study found that PTSD was the [most common](#) long-term psychiatric condition among survivors.

While it might not be traumatic for all, the Covid pandemic *has* been what is called a chronic stressor, meaning a nearly constant source of stress and anxiety. On-and-off lockdowns, millions of deaths, fragmented childhoods, devastating losses, health anxieties—all have taken their toll. It’s normal—and reasonable—that a return to normal will spark anxiety for some, says Bonanno. Many have grown accustomed to a hermit lifestyle, or have even found comfort in it. Some may even want to stay locked inside for longer, for fear of being infected, a reaction that has been dubbed “[cave syndrome](#).” And there is evidence that the constant hum of distress has translated into longer-lasting conditions for many. According to data from the UK's Office for National Statistics, rates of depression [doubled](#) in the UK in early 2021. Reports of anxiety and depression symptoms also [rose dramatically in the US](#).

After all, it’s hard to ignore that Covid is still very much here. Life is inherently risky. Common activities—such as crossing the street or driving a car—all carry risk. But the stakes are higher now for many everyday activities. Before the pandemic, the biggest risk of a trip to the pub was the next day’s hangover. Now, it’s catching a virus. “What I think is hard now is that people kind of want to say, ‘Well, when is it safe? When is it going to come back to the point of being safe?’” says Julie Downs, a social psychologist who researches risk perception at Carnegie Mellon University. But 100 percent safety against Covid might never arrive.

And crucially, we haven’t all weathered the same storm. Certain communities have been forced to shoulder the worst effects of the pandemic: people of color and those in poorer areas have suffered the most. And for many, a forced return to normalcy means returning with a disabling, life-shrinking condition: It’s estimated that [1.3 million people](#) in the UK are living with [long Covid](#), a term used to describe a case of Covid that stretches on for weeks or months, with symptoms such as [brain fog](#), fatigue, and shortness of breath.

For some, there is no return to normal. For Nick York, the loosening of restrictions for others means tighter restrictions in his own life. York, who is in his late fifties and lives in the Midlands in England, has been living with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, a cancer of the immune system, for over a decade. His condition means his body doesn’t mount a response to vaccines; it struggles to defend itself against any pathogen. For York and other immunocompromised people, a government’s declaration that society will “live with Covid” means it will be living without *them*. The dropping of masking requirements means he is largely confined to his home. He can’t go into shops. He can’t travel. He has spent the past two Christmases alone. He struggles to see his own daughter. “It’s essentially removed a swathe of society,” he says of the easing of restrictions.

York describes himself as pretty resilient, but he says he feels forgotten—by his own local community and by the government. “The feeling of isolation, the mental health side of that, it’s hard to manage,” he says.

One of the consequences of the government lifting restrictions is that the onus to take health precautions will fall from the collective to the individual. “As we move to thinking about Covid as an endemic risk instead of a pandemic, it comes along with this shift from a public health approach of ‘What can we *all* do to help reduce the systemic impact of this event?’ to this being one of all the risks that we’re trying to reduce for ourselves,” says Downs. “And it’s going to take a while for people to reorient and make their own decisions.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Seattle, King Co. homelessness promises
SOURCE	<a href="https://projects.seattletimes.com/2022/seattle-king-county-homeless-promises-outcomes/">https://projects.seattletimes.com/2022/seattle-king-county-homeless-promises-outcomes/</a>
GIST	It started during the pandemic. Grand promises, made with increasing frequency, to safely house and shelter homeless people amid the threat of the coronavirus and inflow of federal money.

Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis wanted to double tiny houses in one year. King County Executive Dow Constantine vowed to bring 500 people living outside into shelter before the end of 2021. The city of Seattle was going to build nearly 600 units of affordable housing and fill nearly 500 of them by the end of the year.

But now that 2021 is over, The Seattle Times wants to know: How did they do?

COVID-19 forced local governments to rethink how they address homelessness, realizing early on that traditional shelters with mats on the ground just inches apart would be a tinderbox for the airborne virus to spread. To help make substantial changes to the homelessness system, the region received a surge of federal dollars in pandemic stimulus aid.

And so far, both Seattle and King County have been able to make unprecedented and expansive capital investments to purchase hotels and apartment buildings in a short period of time.

But after obtaining the properties, they've struggled to move into them anywhere near the number of homeless people they said they would.

For example, King County purchased nine properties in 2021 — seven hotels and two apartment buildings — but so far only two hotels are providing shelter to chronically homeless people. One more is currently sheltering Afghan refugees and another is providing a safe place for people with COVID-19 to isolate and quarantine.

The other five properties remain vacant.

Seattle is in a similar position. In September, then-Mayor Jenny Durkan announced that the city would help buy three brand-new apartment buildings with the goal of filling them by the end of the year. But on the last day of 2021, no one was there.

In summer 2020, the city's Office of Housing announced a plan to build six new affordable housing buildings with the goal of having 496 units ready for tenants by the end of 2021. Now, in the new year, the department is saying that one building in Greenwood with 66 units — about 13% of what was promised — will be ready for tenants "early this year." Two more are under construction and three are still in the permitting stages.

"Construction projects across the entire building sector, these affordable housing developments included, have faced unprecedented challenges and delays over the past two years, due to impacts from the pandemic," said Stephanie Velasco, spokesperson for Seattle's Office of Housing.

Every county and city department cited similar pandemic-related problems — increased building costs, supply chain issues, not enough workers to staff the new hotels and apartment buildings.

"It continues to be true that the provider workforce is under immense strain while simultaneously doing some of our community's most difficult work," said Sherry Hamilton, spokesperson for King County's Department of Community and Human Services.

Some delays are less cut and dry.

As part of Seattle's "shelter surge," the city set aside \$2.3 million to provide rapid-rehousing dollars to help up to 231 people living in new shelters and hotels leased by the city move into permanent housing.

The city was unable to say how many rehousing dollars have been spent and is waiting for the hotel programs to close at the end of January to do a full accounting. An organization running one of the hotel programs, the Low Income Housing Institute, reported that only 33 people have taken advantage of the money.

“This is because the referrals from the HOPE team into the hotel of chronically homeless people swept from the parks and public places do not fit the profile of people who would succeed in (rapid rehousing),” said Josh Castle, spokesperson for LIHL.

Some projects, however, have met their goals on time.

In March, Seattle said it would lease two hotels for up to one year. It did and now the program is ending and most of the people in the program are transferring to permanent supportive housing.

### **PROMISE NO. 1**

#### **Purchase seven hotels and one apartment building**

[\*Source: King County has quickly bought seven hotels for homeless people, but will it be enough?\*](#)

#### **PROMISE KEPT**

After announcing it would purchase eight properties to house homeless people, King County exceeded its goal and purchased nine properties — seven hotels and two apartment buildings.

But currently, only two out of the nine are providing shelter to homeless people.

King County used money from a 0.1% sales tax, called Health Through Housing, to exceed its planned eight property acquisitions in 2021. The tax, which passed in October 2020, was created to quickly purchase housing for people who are chronically homeless.

### **PROMISE NO. 2**

#### **House 1,600 people in hotels by the end of 2022**

[\*Source: King County plans to buy hotels to permanently house 1,600 homeless people\*](#)

#### **PROMISE IN PROGRESS**

King County set a goal in 2021 to house 1,600 homeless people in hotels by the end of 2022. It has purchased 859 units in hotels and apartment buildings.

Currently, the county is using only two of its nine Health Through Housing properties to shelter chronically homeless people. Two more hotels are being used by the county to shelter Afghan refugees and people dealing with COVID-19.

Once those two hotels are through with their emergency-use purposes, they’ll house homeless people as the county works to open the other five properties, according to Sherry Hamilton, spokesperson for King County’s Department of Community and Human Services.

### **PROMISE NO. 3**

#### **Bring 500 people in off the streets of Seattle by the end of 2021**

[\*Source: King County announces new proposal to bring 500 homeless residents into shelter using federal stimulus funds\*](#)

#### **PROMISE BROKEN**

In April, King County Executive Dow Constantine announced a goal to bring 500 people living unsheltered in Seattle into shelter by the end of 2021.

According to the county, around half of the goal has been met.

King County officials say that new and increasingly contagious variants of the coronavirus have slowed their ability to bring people inside. “For our provider network, the substantial staff challenges include not just hiring new staff for new shelter and housing, but keeping the existing staff healthy and able to report to work,” Hamilton said. The county has housed 69 people in other hotels, shelters and other places, in addition to the 180 in the two opened hotels.

### **PROMISE NO. 4**

#### **Expand tiny house villages**

[\*Source: With two new villages and an expansion, the effort to double tiny house villages in Seattle begins\*](#)

## **PROMISE KEPT**

By the end of 2021, the city did complete this goal. Two new villages opened and the village at Interbay added 30 new units.

Seattle's capacity jumped from 335 houses to 441 houses.

Adding two new villages to Seattle's tiny house landscape and expanding Interbay has increased the city's tiny house count by 106 units and helped 123 people come inside. The nonprofit Low Income Housing Institute manages these three sites and seven other tiny house villages in Seattle. Nickelsville manages two more.

## **PROMISE NO. 5**

### **Add street sinks**

[\*Source: Seattle inches toward street sinks, but timeline and number still fuzzy\*](#)

## **PROMISE BROKEN**

Starting in November 2020, the Seattle City Council earmarked \$100,000 to quickly set up dozens of new outdoor sinks around the city to support homeless residents' hygiene needs.

By the end of 2021, only two sinks had been installed.

When businesses, libraries and other public spaces closed down at the beginning of the pandemic, it cut off many of the spaces that people living unsheltered rely on to meet their hygiene needs. Real Change, Seattle's street newspaper and homeless advocacy organization, worked with architects to design affordable and easy-to-assemble street sinks. But more than a year since the City Council set aside the funds, the project has run into many unanticipated bureaucratic hurdles and red tape, according to Tiffani McCoy, advocacy director for Real Change.

## **PROMISE NO. 6**

### **Buy three new apartment buildings**

[\*Source: Seattle to help buy three new apartment buildings to house people facing homelessness\*](#)

## **PROMISE IN PROGRESS**

In September, the city of Seattle said it would help purchase three brand-new apartment buildings to house people who are homeless. It said that the buildings should be occupied by the end of 2021.

Two were purchased in 2021.

But no one moved in by the end of the year.

Seattle provided half of the funding to purchase all three buildings. The Low Income Housing Institute purchased two of the buildings — Boylston and Broadway — in December, and it's waiting on the third building to finish construction in March. People began moving into the Boylston apartments Jan. 12. In total, the three new buildings will add 166 affordable-housing units for people exiting homelessness.

## **PROMISE NO. 7**

### **Open two hotels for up to one year to house homeless people**

[\*Source: Seattle's homeless 'shelter surge' unveiled with fewer shelter beds, more questions\*](#)

## **PROMISE KEPT**

Both hotels began housing people in March. Both hotel programs are expected to end Jan. 31.

In March, Seattle announced that it was leasing two hotels for one year to offer enhanced shelter to chronically homeless people. That program is ending in January, and the homeless service organizations that have been operating the hotel programs — the Low Income Housing Institute and Chief Seattle Club — are trying to help people move into recently built permanent supportive housing that they own and operate.

## **PROMISE 8**

### **Add 60 new 24-hour shelter beds**

[\*Source: Seattle's homeless 'shelter surge' unveiled with fewer shelter beds, more questions\*](#)



## **PROMISE KEPT**

Seattle funded a 60-bed shelter at Seattle First Presbyterian Church operated by WHEEL. It officially opened in May.

As part of a “shelter surge” plan then-Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan announced in the fall of 2020, a new 24-hour shelter opened in Seattle First Presbyterian Church located on First Hill. The shelter originally opened as an emergency weather shelter during a large snowstorm in February 2021 and then opened as a fully operational shelter that May. WHEEL — the Women’s Housing Equality and Enhancement League — operates the program.

## **PROMISE NO. 9**

**Use rapid-rehousing dollars to move up to 231 people into permanent housing**

[\*Source: Seattle’s homeless ‘shelter surge’ unveiled with fewer shelter beds, more questions\*](#)

## **PROMISE IN PROGRESS**

The city of Seattle can’t say how many people have received rapid-rehousing dollars.

Another large piece of Seattle’s proposed “shelter surge” focused on providing temporary financial support to help people transition from city-leased hotel shelter into permanent housing. The city said it wanted to move as many as 231 people into permanent housing using \$2.3 million. The city is currently unable to provide a full accounting of how much has been spent, saying it is waiting for both hotels to shut down. People working on the ground in the two hotels say that using the money has been challenging for a number of reasons. The Low Income Housing Institute, one of the organizations running the hotel shelter program, says that only 33 people have used the money so far.

## **PROMISE NO. 10**

**Invest \$60 million to build housing for chronically homeless people**

[\*Source: Seattle Housing Levy money will go all in on homeless housing through 2021\*](#)

## **PROMISE IN PROGRESS**

Sixty-six out of the 588 units are almost ready for tenants. Originally, the city said it would have 496 units completed by the end of 2021.

But no one moved in by the end of the year.

In August 2020, Seattle said it would use all of the rental production and preservation funds from the voter-approved Seattle Housing Levy through 2021 to make an upfront \$60 million investment in six new affordable-housing buildings to create 588 units for chronically homeless people. At the time of the announcement, the city estimated that 496 units could be completed by the end of 2021. But so far, only one building is nearing the end of construction to open in early 2022 with 66 units. Two additional buildings are being built, and the three remaining projects are working through the permitting stages to begin construction in 2022.

## **PROMISE NO. 11**

**Double Seattle’s tiny house stock by 2022**

[\*Source: Private companies pledge \\$1 million to build tiny house villages in Seattle\*](#)

## **PROMISE BROKEN**

Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis set a goal to raise \$15 million in private and public funds to build 480 tiny houses by the end of 2021.

He raised \$4.5 million.

No additional homes were built.

In January 2021, Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis announced that he wanted to double the city’s tiny house stock within one year, building 480 tiny homes in just 12 months. At the time of the announcement, Lewis had \$1 million in hand and was hoping to secure \$14 million more in private and public funding. So far he’s been able to grow the funding base, but no additional tiny homes have been

	built. At the time of his announcement, three tiny house villages (which were completed this fall) were already in the works by the city of Seattle, so they aren't counted in this report.
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/29 TSA: record firearm detections across US</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/record-firearm-detections-for-tsa-checkpoints-across-the-united-states-in-2021/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/record-firearm-detections-for-tsa-checkpoints-across-the-united-states-in-2021/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers found 5,972 firearms at 268 different airports in 2021. Some 86% of these guns were loaded.</p> <p>This was a huge increase over 2020's 3,257 firearms detected at 104 airports. In 2021, TSA screened approximately 585 million passengers and crew at airports nationwide. That figure represents a 44% increase over the 339 million screened in 2020. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit travel numbers, the number of firearms caught at TSA checkpoints was lower than that recorded last year – 4,432 in 2019 and 4,239 in 2018.</p> <p>Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport topped the list with 507 firearm finds, the most ever recorded at any airport since the inception of TSA. Dallas Fort Worth International Airport came in second with 317 followed by Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport with 245; Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport with 196; and Nashville International Airport with 163.</p> <p>Even though passenger numbers have not yet fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, several airports set their own records for the highest number of firearm detections at TSA checkpoints. Denver International Airport discovered 141 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, setting a new record at its three security checkpoints.</p> <p>Nationwide, a firearm was detected for every 97,999 passengers screened. But in Tennessee, the rate was more than 2.5 times higher than the national rate with one firearm discovered for every 37,799 passengers screened. TSA officers at Tennessee airports discovered a total of 283 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021. Nashville International Airport broke a statewide record with 163 guns found, a total higher than the sum of all Tennessee airports combined in 2020.</p> <p>In Georgia, the rate was also more than double the national rate—with one firearm discovered for every 40,570 passengers screened. TSA officers at Georgia airports discovered a total of 542 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, with the bulk of these at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.</p> <p>In Virginia, TSA officers stopped 98 handguns at the region's airport security checkpoints in 2021, a new record and a huge jump from the 55 guns caught in 2020. TSA officers at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport detected 30 guns in 2021, three times as many handguns compared to 2020 when 10 were caught. The TSA team at Washington Dulles International Airport also saw a huge spike in the number of guns caught in 2021 when 19 were detected compared to only seven in 2020. Norfolk International Airport also saw nearly double the number of guns detected in 2021 when 23 were caught compared to 12 that were stopped at checkpoints in 2020.</p> <p>Passengers bringing guns to TSA checkpoints also reached record levels across Louisiana in 2021 with Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport coming in ninth in the country. TSA officers at the airport intercepted 119 guns. Across the state 162 passengers brought guns to the checkpoints compared to 85 in 2020 and 91 in 2019. In addition to the 119 at Louis Armstrong New Orleans, TSA officers stopped 17 guns at Shreveport Regional, seven at Lafayette Regional, six at Baton Rouge Metropolitan, five at Alexandria International, four at Lake Charles Regional and four at Monroe Regional Airport.</p> <p>TSA officers set a record for the number of guns detected at Pennsylvania airport security checkpoints last year. They stopped 89 handguns at Pennsylvania airport security checkpoints in 2021, a sharp increase from the 57 guns detected in 2020 and a spike from the 71 caught in 2019. The largest increase in guns</p>



brought to checkpoints took place at Philadelphia and Pittsburgh International Airports. Thirty-nine guns were caught at Philadelphia last year, which set a new record for the number caught at the airport. At Pittsburgh, TSA officers caught 32 firearms at security checkpoints. Increases in gun detections at security checkpoints also took place at Arnold Palmer Regional, Lehigh Valley International and Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International airports.

Passengers bringing guns to TSA checkpoints also reached record levels across Florida in 2021. A total of 666 guns were intercepted by TSA across the state, a 26 percent increase from the highest previous totals of 529 and 528 in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (128) and Orlando International Airport (124) were in the top 10 in the country for this dangerous violation of federal regulations. Both airports set records as did many other airports across the state. At Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport the 128 guns compares to a previous record of 100 in 2019. The total at Orlando of 124 is one more than the record of 123 in 2018. The third highest in the state was at Tampa International Airport where TSA officers intercepted 105 guns, four of those guns in one day back in May, and exceeded a record previously set with 97 guns in 2017. A record also was set at Miami International with 80 guns stopped in 2021, where the previous record had been 60 in 2020. Pensacola International Airport, Southwest Florida International Airport and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport all set records in 2021 as well.

TSA officers at North Carolina airports discovered a total of 254 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, with several airports across the state doubling or tripling their 2020 totals.

Missouri airports discovered a total of 183 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021. TSA at St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL) broke a statewide record with 102 guns found, a total higher than the sum of all Missouri airports combined in 2020.

TSA officers stopped 91 handguns at Chicago O'Hare International Airport security checkpoints in 2021, and 42 at Chicago Midway International Airport, a notable increase over the totals in both 2020 and 2019.

Nine handguns were caught at West Virginia airport security checkpoints in 2021, one more than the eight detected in 2020.

Upstate New York airport security checkpoints saw TSA officers stop 19 handguns in 2021, an increase from the 13 caught in 2020.

South Carolina airports discovered a total of 72 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, a new annual record for the state.

Kentucky airports discovered a total of 119 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, more than double the number found in 2020.

TSA officers stopped 23 handguns at Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport security checkpoints in 2021, a notable increase from the 16 guns caught in 2019. 35 firearms were detected at airports across Wisconsin.

In Indiana, TSA officers stopped 74 handguns at Indianapolis International Airport security checkpoints in 2021, a notable increase over the 62 detected in 2019. Statewide TSA stopped almost 100 firearms from being carried onto a flight.

94 handguns were stopped by TSA at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport security checkpoints in 2021, a notable increase over the 47 detected in 2019. Michigan also saw high numbers of firearm detections at Gerald R. Ford, Flint Bishop and Cherry Capital airports.

TSA officers at Salt Lake City International Airport discovered 115 firearms in travelers' carry-on luggage in 2021, easily surpassing prior years' totals for firearm finds at

There was also an increase in detections at Ohio airports where TSA officers stopped 43 handguns at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport security checkpoints in 2021, a notable increase over the 26 detected in 2019. A total of 89 firearms, most of which were loaded, were found by TSA officers at Ohio airport checkpoints last year.

A total of 40 firearms were detected at seven New England airports in 2021. TSA detected five more firearms in 2021 at New England Airports than it did in 2019, despite screening 13.3 million fewer passengers. Burlington International and T.F. Green Airport were the only two New England airports that saw declines from 2019 detections.

A few other airports narrowly bucked the trend. TSA officers stopped 26 handguns at New York City area airport checkpoints in 2021, an increase from the 17 guns caught in 2020 but one less than in 2019.

It is worth noting that gun sales soared in 2020. The rise was largely fueled by first-time gun owners including women and politically liberal buyers who have not previously considered gun ownership. As first-time gun owners, it is highly conceivable that they would not have been fully aware of the correct way to travel with their firearm when they made their first journeys as gun owners.

Many people also swapped traveling by air to personal car travel during the pandemic so had often turned up to the checkpoint with a bag packed previously for personal car travel, which still had some items from their earlier trip at the bottom of the bag or in side pockets.

So what is the correct way to travel with a firearm? Airline passengers can fly with firearms in checked baggage if the firearms are properly packed and declared at check-in. However, firearm possession laws vary by state and locality. TSA advises travelers to familiarize themselves with state and local firearm laws for each point of travel prior to departure to ensure they transport guns in accordance with applicable laws. Airlines may have additional requirements for traveling with firearms and ammunition, so travelers should also contact the airline regarding firearm and ammunition carriage policies prior to arriving at the airport.

In some cities, local law enforcement may file criminal charges against travelers who bring firearms to the TSA checkpoint. TSA will assess civil penalties that vary by number of previous offenses and whether the firearm was loaded at the time. The complete [list of penalties](#) is posted on TSA.gov. Firearms are not permitted in the passenger cabin of an airplane; this includes travelers with a concealed weapon permit.

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HEADLINE	01/31 Omicron: 'stealth' subvariant BA.2
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/31/omicron-what-do-we-know-about-stealth-subvariant-ba2">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/31/omicron-what-do-we-know-about-stealth-subvariant-ba2</a>
GIST	<p>The highly transmissible <a href="#">Omicron variant</a> of the Sars-CoV-2 virus – the most common form of which is known as BA.1 – now accounts for nearly all of the coronavirus infections globally.</p> <p>Though Covid cases have already peaked in some countries, scientists are now tracking a rise in cases caused by a close cousin of Omicron known as BA.2, which is starting to outcompete BA.1 in parts of <a href="#">Europe</a> and Asia. The following is what we know so far about the new subvariant.</p> <p><b>‘Stealth’ subvariant</b></p> <p>Globally, BA.1 accounted for 98.8% of sequenced cases submitted to the public virus tracking database GISAID as of 25 January. But several countries are reporting recent increases in BA.2, according to the World <a href="#">Health</a> Organization (WHO).</p> <p>In addition to BA.1 and BA.2, the WHO lists two other subvariants under the Omicron umbrella: BA.1.1.529 and BA.3. All are closely related genetically, but each features mutations that could alter how they behave.</p>

Trevor Bedford, a computational virologist at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Centre in the US, has been tracking the evolution of Sars-CoV-2. On Friday he wrote on Twitter that BA.2 represents roughly 82% of cases in Denmark, 9% in the UK and 8% in the US. He based his analysis on sequencing data from the GISAID database and case counts from the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford in the UK.

The BA.1 version of Omicron has been somewhat easier to track than prior variants. That is because BA.1 is missing one of three target genes used in a common PCR test. Cases showing this pattern were assumed by default to be caused by BA.1.

BA.2, sometimes known as a “stealth” subvariant, does not have the same missing target gene. Instead, scientists are monitoring it the same way they have prior variants, including Delta, by tracking the number of virus genomes submitted to public databases such as GISAID.

As with other variants, an infection with BA.2 can be detected by coronavirus home tests kits, though they cannot indicate which variant is responsible, experts say.

### **More transmissible?**

Some early reports indicate that BA.2 may be even more infectious than the already extremely contagious BA.1, but there is no evidence so far that it is more likely to evade vaccine protection.

Danish health officials estimate that BA.2 may be 1.5 times more transmissible than BA.1, based on preliminary data, though it likely does not cause more severe disease.

In England, a preliminary analysis of contact tracing from 27 December through to 11 January by the UK Health Security Agency suggests that household transmission is higher among contacts of people infected with BA.2 (13.4%) compared with other Omicron cases (10.3%). The agency found no evidence of a difference in vaccine effectiveness.

A critical question was whether people who were infected in the BA.1 wave would be protected from BA.2, said Dr Egon Ozer, an infectious disease expert at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. That had been a concern in Denmark, where some places that saw high case counts of BA.1 infections were reporting rising cases of BA.2, he said.

If prior BA.1 infection did not protect against BA.2, “this could be sort of a two-humped camel kind of wave”, Ozer said. “It’s too early to know if that will happen.”

The good news, he said, was that vaccines and boosters still “keep people out of the hospital and keep people from dying”.

### **Where is BA.2 most prominent?**

Prof Seshadri Vasan, a Covid-19 vaccine researcher from Australia’s Science Agency, the CSIRO, said analysis of GISAID showed that as of 27 January, 10,811 BA.2 sequences had been reported from around the world including Australia (22 sequences), but 90% of the sequences were from three countries: Denmark (8,357), India (711) and the UK (607).

“So far, evidence from our colleagues in Denmark show that while it could spread faster, there is no evidence of increased severity,” he said. “Therefore it is important to keep calm and continue existing measures such as getting ourselves the vaccinated, including the booster dose, and following social distancing, masks and local guidelines.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 World moves toward living with Covid
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-pushes-health-authorities-toward-learning-to-live-with-covid-19-11643537865?mod=hp_lead_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-pushes-health-authorities-toward-learning-to-live-with-covid-19-11643537865?mod=hp_lead_pos4</a>

The [Omicron variant](#) spreads so quickly and generally causes such a mild form of illness among vaccinated populations that countries are tolerating greater Covid-19 outbreaks, willingly letting infections balloon to levels that not long ago would have been treated as public-health crises.

From different starting points, authorities in North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific [are moving in the same direction](#), offering a glimpse into a future in which Covid-19 becomes accepted as a fact of everyday life, like seasonal flu.

Health officials everywhere, many for the first time, are forgoing some of the sharpest tools they have to combat Omicron—even as infections soar. They are accepting the virus like never before to minimize disruptions to economies, education and everyday life.

At the moment, [deaths and hospitalizations are at highs](#) in many countries, and in some, [hospitals are overwhelmed](#). But they are a much lower percentage of total cases than earlier waves. Vaccines [have made the disease less deadly](#), and treatments hold a greater promise of recovery for those who are infected and get seriously ill.

That improving outlook, coupled with the reality that the measures taken to contain earlier surges of the virus don't work as well against the more-contagious Omicron, is informing the decision by policy makers to abandon restrictive steps aimed at containment amid [growing public fatigue over restrictions](#).

That makes Omicron a key turning point in a pandemic rounding into a third year. Public-health authorities had long championed flattening infection curves and shouldering personal responsibility to socially distance, wear face masks and get vaccinated. But the Omicron variant [is regarded as so transmissible](#) that even the harshest and economically most-damaging lockdowns are unlikely to keep the virus out. In South Africa, the U.K. and some countries hit earlier than the U.S. by Omicron, case counts [surged rapidly and then declined quickly](#), a different pattern than earlier variants.

That assessment is forcing a recalculation by health officials over what can—and should—constitute success. “Governments don't want to be accused of being slow to relax anymore,” said Teo Yik-Ying, dean of the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Meanwhile, millions of people are becoming infected and suffering mild or no symptoms. From South Africa to Europe to Asia, governments have largely experienced manageable levels of hospitalizations and death.

Rapidly rising case counts are no longer the bellwether they once were, undermining the conclusion that more cases call for more restrictions.

“We've understood we're not going to be able to eliminate the virus,” said Monica Gandhi, an infectious-disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco.

There is a growing acceptance among governments that Covid-19 will need to be dealt with like other infections, focusing on treating hospitalized patients, as vaccines keep many people from becoming severely ill, she said.

Anthony Fauci, President Biden's top medical adviser, said recently that levels of death and hospitalization associated with Covid-19 in the U.S. justified precautions including masking in many settings to continue for now. But a future in which the disease is under sufficient control is in sight, he said.

“We believe we can get there because we have the tools with vaccines, with boosts, with masks, with tests and with antivirals,” Dr. Fauci said. “We still have a way to go.”

Australia has reported more infections and deaths this month than it had throughout the entire pandemic. During past outbreaks, the country's border closures were so strict that some citizens were stranded overseas or faced two-week quarantines once back home. This time Australia has imposed no such limits.

"You have two choices here. You can push through, or you can lock down," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in January. "We're for pushing through."

Tools that were used earlier in the pandemic, such as contact tracing and long self-isolation periods, are being abandoned in many countries. Five U.S. public-health groups recently said they supported a move away from blanket Covid-19 case investigations and contact tracing.

The groups, including the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, said the wide availability of vaccines and Omicron's infectiousness made a comprehensive monitoring approach less optimal. Instead, the groups said health officials should focus on targeted investigations in higher-risk settings that serve vulnerable populations.

Schools that once shut down for months when hit by a Covid-19 outbreak are now closing for days. In the U.S., Burbio Inc., a data company that tracks K-12 school closures, showed 7,461 schools weren't offering in-person learning one or more days during the week beginning Jan. 10. The number had dropped to 2,103 in the week of Jan. 24.

The healthcare industry is also shifting away from strict isolation measures. ShiftMed, an online platform with more than 60,000 users that allows U.S. healthcare workers to pick up open shifts at healthcare facilities, said many nurses are being asked to work despite testing positive for Covid-19.

In a survey of 600 nurses, 33% said they were asked to work despite having asymptomatic Covid-19 and 37% said they were asked to come into work despite being exposed to Covid-19 by a close contact. About 90% of nurses surveyed were vaccinated.

In the U.K., where case counts at the start of the year were running at almost triple the rate of the previous highs a year earlier, the government allowed pubs and restaurants to remain open and major sporting events to go ahead with large crowds.

In parts of the country, one in 10 people was carrying the virus at the start of the year before infections started to drop. Even so, more recently, some 12% of children between the ages of 2 and 12 were estimated by the Office for National Statistics to be infected.

That prevalence hasn't translated into deaths in the way that previous surges did. The number of people on mechanical-ventilator beds has fallen this month, belying previous experience. The U.K. has now lifted just about all of its restrictions related to Covid-19.

A possible obstacle to the shift toward living with Covid-19 is the development of another variant that provokes more serious illness or better evades immunity from vaccines.

Omicron isn't the last word of the coronavirus. Early evidence indicates that a derivative of Omicron known as BA. 2 spreads even faster and is gaining ground in countries such as the U.K. and Denmark. It has been identified in about 40 countries world-wide, including the U.S.

So far there is no evidence that it causes more serious illness or that it sidesteps vaccines better than Omicron. In Denmark, where scientists say BA. 2 might already be the dominant variant, the government has decided to join others across Europe in relaxing controls, lifting most mandatory restrictions on Feb. 1.

In Singapore, where infections have risen and are expected to increase more, some 99.7% of cases in recent weeks have been asymptomatic or mild. Local media, taking the cue from health officials, now emphasize the number of patients hospitalized or requiring intensive care rather than highlighting daily case counts. Of the city-state's 5.7 million people, 13 are in intensive-care units.

Those results, coupled with the nearly 90% vaccination rate in Singapore, have meant it no longer uses an army of contact tracers to identify and crush all transmission, opting for automated detection. Residents who had backed tight restrictions, even when outbreaks were fractions of the size today, are expressing openness to marching on.

“We’re going to get it sooner or later; it seems like it’s just luck of the draw,” said Grace See, a 29-year-old recruitment specialist at a Singaporean firm. “We’ve reached a stage of acceptance.”

As recently as last fall, South Korea’s toughest distancing measures were reserved for only when daily infections averaged roughly 2,000 for a week. Omicron shattered the country’s metrics. On Sunday, the country reported daily infections had hit a record of more than 17,000 ahead of Lunar New Year holidays that could see cases more than double. The country’s health officials pledged not to tighten restrictions.

Instead they relaxed them, citing relatively low rates of death and severe illness. They let groups of six gather, up from four. They dropped its test-everyone policy that had long corralled outbreaks. They shortened quarantine times from 10 days to seven for vaccinated individuals who get Covid-19 but don’t show severe symptoms.

“Distancing is a measure that incurs high socioeconomic costs,” said Sohn Young-rae, a senior health official.

Lee Yeon-jin, a 30-year-old office worker in Seoul, has decided enough is enough. “We’re no longer staying home because there are thousands of cases,” Ms. Lee said.

In Japan, the number of daily cases was around 100 in early December, but Omicron sparked a surge to more than 80,000 this past week.

Despite the numbers, Japan has relaxed some rules. Doctors and nurses are allowed to continue to work even if they become close contacts as long as their Covid-19 tests turn up negative. The government dropped its policy of hospitalizing all Omicron-positive patients, allowing asymptomatic or mild patients who are young and at low risk to recover at home.

“It’s important to tackle this issue in such a way that society and economic activities can continue,” said government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno on Thursday.

Hong Kong, under pressure from international business groups, this past week shortened what had been one of the world’s longest quarantine requirements for inbound travelers from three weeks to two.

Some public-health measures will still be necessary in places to buy people time to get booster shots and manage stress on hospitals, said Ben Cowling, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Hong Kong.

“The next few months will be challenging because of Omicron, but lockdowns are no longer justified,” he said.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Aluminum price can't keep up energy costs
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/aluminum-prices-cant-keep-up-with-energy-costs-driving-wave-of-closures-11643547605?mod=hp_lead_pos11">https://www.wsj.com/articles/aluminum-prices-cant-keep-up-with-energy-costs-driving-wave-of-closures-11643547605?mod=hp_lead_pos11</a>
GIST	<p>Tensions between the U.S. and Russia over Ukraine are exacerbating a shakeout in the aluminum sector, which has been hammered by rising power prices over the past year.</p> <p>The price of aluminum has increased by 24% over the past six months to more than \$3,100 a metric ton, approaching a decade high. The <a href="#">prospect of a Russian invasion of Ukraine</a> has made matters worse. Russia</p>

is one of the world's biggest aluminum producers and traders [fear disruptions to its exports](#) if conflict breaks out.

That is adding to the pressure that has built over months of rising energy costs. These have led to the closure of plants in China and Europe that haven't been able to cut costs deep enough to remain profitable.

In Europe, natural-gas prices are almost five times as high as they were a year ago because of cold weather and [a drop in the flow of gas from Russia](#). Energy can account for up to half of the cost of making aluminum, which is why traders nicknamed the commodity congealed electricity.

Traders fear smelter closures will make it tougher to secure supplies in a market that is used to having plenty of metal to go around. Rising aluminum costs are an added expense for buyers such as auto makers, already grappling with supply-chain constraints including a [global computer-chip shortage](#).

[Alcoa](#) Corp. said late last year that it would shut its unprofitable San Ciprián aluminum plant in Spain, which has an annual capacity of 228,000 tons. It will likely be offline for roughly two years because of challenges stemming from what Alcoa called exorbitant energy prices. The price of electricity in Spain hit a record high late last year.

"This has been a challenging road for everyone involved," Alcoa Chief Executive Roy Harvey said when announcing the decision.

Norwegian aluminum producer [Norsk Hydro](#) AS A also said it would cut output at a plant in Slovakia to 60% of its capacity in response to electricity prices which show no sign of falling in the short term.

Other companies that own aluminum smelters in places including Montenegro, Romania and France have also laid out plans for production cutbacks. Those follow a string of cuts from producers of the metal in China amid [a power shortage](#) there.

Smelters have recently taken about 810,000 tons in annual production capacity in Europe offline, according to Lynn Zhao, a commodity strategist at Macquarie. With several million tons also out of action in China, about 4 million tons of capacity have been closed or mothballed globally as energy prices run high.

There are several more smelters in Europe that might have to cut production or close over the next few months if energy prices don't retreat, analysts say.

Already, stockpiles of aluminum in warehouses approved by the LME have shrunk to fewer than 850,000 tons, the lowest level since 2007, according to FactSet. In March 2021, they stood more than twice as high.

Metal in LME-approved sheds gives a glimpse into global supplies and can be misleading. However, analysts and investors say reduced stockpiles in warehouses viewed as a market of last resort are a sign that overall supply is short.

Based on known closures, Morgan Stanley estimates aluminum supply could fall 1 million tons short of demand in 2022. Shipping bottlenecks are still making it difficult to move aluminum to areas clamoring for it.

Roughly 67 million tons of primary aluminum—derived from raw material rather than scrap—is produced world-wide each year. China accounts for more than half of global output, while the U.S. is the world's biggest importer of the metal.

A recovery in China's production could quickly boost global supply. However, policy makers in Beijing want to cap aluminum production to control carbon emissions following a yearslong expansion that left the world awash with metal.



“For probably the last 15 to 20 years, the Chinese have just created a glut of oversupply and you see that rebalancing now,” said Graham Kerr, chief executive of producer South32 Ltd.

Among investors betting on a continuing rally is Luke Sadrian, chief investment officer at London-based hedge fund Commodities World Capital. He thinks prices could rise above \$4,000 a ton, but that they won’t move in a straight line.

“When you close an aluminum plant down you’re not just doing it for a couple of days,” Mr. Sadrian said. “Because of the power situation going on now, aluminum might start to trade like an ore in short supply and be a lot more volatile.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Foreign journalists in China face threats</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/foreign-journalists-in-china-say-they-face-deepening-intimidation-11643590861?mod=hp_listb_pos3">https://www.wsj.com/articles/foreign-journalists-in-china-say-they-face-deepening-intimidation-11643590861?mod=hp_listb_pos3</a>
GIST	<p>HONG KONG—Foreign news organizations in China are operating at drastically reduced staffing levels, while the foreign journalists still in the country face intimidation, harassment and threats of legal action there, a Beijing-based journalist group said.</p> <p>Almost all foreign journalists surveyed by the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China in an annual assessment of working conditions said reporting conditions in the country didn’t meet international standards.</p> <p>“The Chinese state continues to find new ways to intimidate foreign correspondents, their Chinese colleagues, and those whom the foreign press seeks to interview, via online trolling, physical assaults, cyber hacking, and visa denials,” the club said in a report published Monday.</p> <p>The shrinking number of foreign journalists in the country—blocked from entering by stringent visa rules, or driven out by difficult working conditions—has meant “covering China is increasingly becoming an exercise in remote reporting,” the report’s authors wrote.</p> <p>China’s treatment of foreign journalists has worsened in recent years, as heightened tensions between the U.S. and China during the Trump administration prompted each side to target journalists with restrictions or, in some instances, <a href="#">outright expulsions</a>. Conditions in China for the foreign press only appear to be worsening, the report said.</p> <p>China’s Foreign Ministry didn’t respond to a faxed request for comment on assertions in the report.</p> <p>The report comes as China makes final preparations for the Winter Olympics in Beijing, which will bring large numbers of foreign journalists to the city when the Games begin Friday. Despite the influx, the country’s <a href="#">tough Covid-19 restrictions</a> mean their movements will be restricted to a tightly enforced “closed loop” around Olympic events.</p> <p>Nine in 10 China-based correspondents who replied to the survey said they wouldn’t enter the Olympic zone so they could maintain mobility and continue reporting. China’s adherence to its <a href="#">zero-Covid-19 policy</a> has also led to harsh and unpredictable quarantines, making it difficult to report outside of the country’s main cities where most media are based, the report’s authors wrote, adding that authorities appeared to cite such restrictions in delaying issuance of press credentials or obstructing reporting trips.</p> <p>Many journalists in China said they experienced harassment in the field in the course of reporting, including from ordinary citizens who are increasingly hostile to foreign journalists, which the report’s authors attributed to state-backed attacks and online campaigns portraying the foreign press as inherently hostile to China.</p>



Nearly a quarter of respondents said they were subjected to online trolling over their reporting, while several said they were targeted with legal action by government officials or once-cooperative sources. One reporter for the British Broadcasting Corp. said that he had been forced to relocate to Taiwan with his family following severe online trolling and threats of Chinese legal action over his reports.

A deepening concern, many respondents said, was the growing dearth of foreign reporters in China. Authorities are granting few visas to correspondents wishing to be based in the country, while many who successfully enter are subjected to truncated visa stays requiring frequent renewals.

China has said that its restrictions are merely [a response to American restrictions](#) on the visas of Chinese journalists working in the U.S.

Major media outlets are increasingly forced to cover the country from faraway bureaus in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Australia, diminishing the quality of coverage, the report's authors wrote.

Following a series of expulsions in 2020 of U.S.-based Chinese journalists and China-based American journalists, both sides agreed in November [to ease visa restrictions](#) for the other country's reporters. The Wall Street Journal was among a handful of U.S. outlets set to receive new press credentials for some staff. As of the end of last year, China had yet to grant visas to the U.S. reporters promised them under the agreement, the foreign reporters' group said.

"Coverage of China is suffering," the FCCC wrote in the report. "International news organizations are fighting tooth and nail to continue providing a quality level of reporting despite reduced in-country staff. Nothing replaces on-the-ground reporting, free of state obstruction and surveillance."

The report was based on a survey of its members conducted in December. The group, whose membership includes journalists from 30 countries and regions, said 127 of its 192 members responded to the survey.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Gov. hopeful of near future turning point
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3328671/gov-inslee-hopeful-relaxed-covid-restrictions-relatively-near-term/">https://mynorthwest.com/3328671/gov-inslee-hopeful-relaxed-covid-restrictions-relatively-near-term/</a>
GIST	<p>With COVID-19 cases beginning to decline in parts of Washington, Gov. Jay Inslee expressed optimism regarding the state's status in the near future.</p> <p>Most counties in Western Washington have reported waning case numbers for most of the last week. In King County, the seven-day daily average has dipped 29% in the one week period ending on Jan. 27, while hospitalizations have dropped by 20%.</p> <p>Speaking <a href="#">during a Thursday press conference</a>, Inslee pointed to other countries that dealt with omicron-fueled surges prior to the variant's arrival in Washington, most of which experienced a rapid decline weeks later.</p> <p>"We are hopeful that we will see a plateauing and soon, hopefully a decline of these cases across the state of Washington," he said. "The latest modeling suggests that may have already occurred in Western Washington."</p> <p>He went on to describe how he feels optimistic that the presence of the more infectious but less severe variant strain could be a precursor to a shift in Washington's COVID-19 restrictions.</p> <p>"I think in the relatively near term, we may be in a place to have a much more normal endemic approach to what will be with us for a long period of time, and I'm looking forward to that day," Inslee said.</p> <p>That echoes <a href="#">recent sentiments</a> out of the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, which predicted that "the era of major restrictions is coming to an end."</p>

That said, Inslee also clarified that even when Washington does arrive in a place where it can relax its COVID safety measures, vaccinations will still be a critical piece of ensuring the state doesn't backslide.

"I can tell you this, when that day comes, it will still be really healthy for people to get the vaccination — I just cannot stress this enough," he said. "The people who are dying today in our hospitals, they're dying because they were not vaccinated, and the evidence continues to mount for the importance of (the vaccine) and the efficacy of it."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Rising rents forcing millions to move
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/01/30/rent-inflation-housing/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/01/30/rent-inflation-housing/</a>
GIST	<p>Kiara Age moved in less than a year ago and now it's time to move again: Rent on her two-bedroom apartment in Henderson, Nev., is rising 23 percent to nearly \$1,600 a month, making it impossibly out of reach for the single mother.</p> <p>Age makes \$15 an hour working from home as a medical biller while also caring for her 1-year-old son, because she can't afford child care. By the time she pays rent — which takes up more than half of her salary — and buys groceries, there's little left over.</p> <p>"I am trying to figure out what I can do," said Age, 32, who also has an 8-year-old daughter. "Rent is so high that I can't afford anything."</p> <p>Rental prices across the country have been rising for months, but lately the increases have been sharper and more widespread, forcing millions of Americans to reassess their living situations.</p> <p>Average rents rose 14 percent last year, to \$1,877 a month, with cities like Austin, New York and Miami notching increases of as much as 40 percent, according to real estate firm Redfin. And Americans expect rents will continue to rise — by <a href="#">about 10 percent</a> this year — according to a report released this month by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. At the same time, many local rent freezes and eviction moratoriums have already expired.</p> <p>"Rents really shot up in the second half of 2021," said Daryl Fairweather, chief economist at Redfin. "The pandemic was kind of a pause on the economy and now that things are reopening, inflation is picking up, rents are going up and people are realizing they don't have as much disposable income as they might have thought they had."</p> <p>Higher rent prices are also expected to be a key driver of inflation in coming months. Housing costs make up a third of the U.S. consumer price index, which is calculated based on the going rate of home rentals. But economists say there is a lag of 9 to 12 months before rising rents show up in inflation measures. As a result, even if inflation were to subside for all other components of the consumer price index, rising rents alone could keep inflation levels elevated through the year, said Frank Nothaft, chief economist at real estate data firm CoreLogic.</p> <p>While the Federal Reserve's likely interest rate increases are expected to slow soaring housing costs — already mortgage rates have been trending higher, which tends to cool the real estate market — the restraint on rental prices is expected to be much less direct and take longer to filter through.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Biden administration has begun reallocating unused funds from its \$46.5 billion Emergency Rental Assistance program to help residents with rent and utility payments in cities such as <a href="#">Washington, D.C.</a>, Houston and San Diego. President Biden has also vowed to add <a href="#">nearly 100,000 affordable homes</a> over the next three years by providing low-cost funding to qualifying developers, and encouraging states and local governments to reduce zoning and financing rules for affordable housing.</p>

The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in many parts of life, and housing is no different. Homeowners benefited from rock-bottom interest rates and surging home prices, while renters have faced surging costs with little reprieve. And unlike markups in other categories — such as food or gas, where prices can waver in both directions — economists say annual leases and long-term mortgages make it unlikely that housing costs will come back down quickly once they rise.

Eleven million households, or 1 in 4 renters, spend more than half of their monthly income on rent, according to an analysis of 2018 census data by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, though experts say that figure is likely even higher now.

"The fact is, for too many Americans, housing is unaffordable," said Dennis Shea, executive director of the J. Ronald Terwilliger Center for Housing Policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center. "We have an inadequate supply of homes — for both rent and for sale — and of course the lowest income families are being hit hardest."

In interviews with renters around the country, many said their monthly payments had recently risen or were set to go up in the coming weeks. Multiple people said that despite local rent freezes, their management companies had found ways to increase monthly dues by tacking on new "amenity fees" or charging for services like trash collection that had previously been included.

Many said they began looking for other rental options, only to find that everything around them had gone up in price, too. Some said they're considering relocating altogether — from Austin to Richmond, or New York City to Dover, Del.

Aleksei Valentín and his husband, both doctoral students, recently downsized from a one-bedroom apartment in Frederick, Md., to a studio in a neighboring county in search of lower rents. Their previous building repeatedly hiked amenity fees during the pandemic, Valentín said, adding about \$200 in extra charges to their monthly rent of \$1,290. That apartment is now on the market for \$1,600.

"First the fees started going up, and then we started getting notices that if we didn't put our trash out exactly like they liked, we'd have to start paying fines," said Valentín, 39. "The more people moved out, the more the amenity fees went up."

There were other problems too but the final straw, he said, came when the company removed the dumpster closest to his apartment. Valentín, who is in a wheelchair, said he had to travel a quarter-mile to dispose of his trash. Now he and his husband pay \$1,400 a month and said they were deliberate about moving to a county with strong tenant rights laws.

Like many millennials, the 30-somethings say home-ownership feels increasingly out of reach. They have student loan debt and little in savings. Even buying a tiny house "feels like a pipe dream," Valentín said.

"Prices are so high, inflation is astronomical, and the house my parents bought for \$30,000 in the late '70s is worth over half a million today," he added. "How can [we] enter into that market without intergenerational wealth? It's impossible."

The share of first-time home buyers has dropped to its lowest level in eight years, according to the National Association of Realtors. The group estimates that nearly 1 million renters were priced out of the housing market last year because of rising real estate prices and increased competition from wealthier, all-cash buyers.

Homes were in short supply even before the pandemic, particularly for low- and middle-income families. In 2020, the market added just [65,000 entry-level homes](#), those smaller than 1,400 square feet, compared with roughly 400,000 a year in the late 1970s, according to federally chartered mortgage investor [Freddie Mac](#). As a result, more families are renting longer.

Desiree Tizon, a 29-year-old social media manager in Miami, was shocked to find that rent for her two-bedroom apartment on the waterfront is jumping 39 percent to nearly \$3,700 a month in March. She's not sure whether she and her boyfriend will move or stay, but said the higher cost cuts into any hope of saving up for a down payment.

"I began looking around Miami, and it turns out all rent prices are up a ton," she said. "We're not finding anything reasonable or even comparable to our unit. Maybe we'll find a place that's \$200 cheaper but is it worth the hassle of moving all of our things?"

She and her boyfriend, who works in tech, both got higher-paying jobs during the pandemic. They could technically afford the extra \$1,000 a month, she said, though it doesn't feel right on principle.

"If we had enough money for a down payment, we could put that into a mortgage," she said. "But now with higher rent, we're stuck in this rat race for that much longer."

Early in the pandemic, Americans, especially those who could work from home, moved from cities to suburbs or bought second vacation homes in search of more space. Low interest rates and booming demand lifted housing prices to record highs. Apartments, meanwhile, were left to grapple with mounting vacancies and began offering perks like free parking, \$500 gift cards, even Peloton bikes and TVs, in exchange for long-term leases.

But as the economy reopened and people headed back to cities, apartments began filling back up. Now, with home prices and mortgage rates both on the upswing, rentals are in high-demand again, giving landlords room to start asking for more money, said Fairweather of Redfin.

In Austin, Shadow LeMere is moving her belongings to storage and preparing to live in her car until she can find an affordable apartment. Rent on the two-bedroom she shares with her wife is set to rise 43 percent, from \$1,500 a month to about \$2,200, in early February.

She and her wife are planning to drive to Georgia to drop off their cat, Ziggy, with a friend. After that, they'll make their way up the East Coast in their Kia Soul until they find a cheaper place to settle down.

"We were pretty much existing on fumes before this," the 49-year-old said. "And now it's gotten so much worse."

LeMere, who used to work as an accountant, receives \$900 a month in disability benefits. Her wife, Brandi Kalinowski, spent a decade as an auditor for a national grocery chain but quit last week in anticipation of the move.

The apartment building where they've lived for seven years typically raises rents by about 6 percent a year, LeMere said. But this year's massive jump has left many residents in dire situations. It's become common, she said, to see piles of people's belongings in the parking lot for nonpayment of rent.

"We can't afford to live here anymore," she said. "Not in Austin, not in Texas. We're going to nomad it for a bit and see where we end up."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Police reform law backfired people in crisis
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Washington-police-reform-bill-backfired-on-people-16817253.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Washington-police-reform-bill-backfired-on-people-16817253.php</a>
GIST	SEATTLE (AP) — For months Diane Ostrander worried desperately about her son.  The 34-year-old had rambling conversations with the television and vowed to kill police. He ranted about children he didn't have being stolen. He wandered outside overnight in a rainstorm, saying he needed to fix a power transformer.

As his condition worsened, the police Ostrander begged for help relayed a consistent message: A new state law meant officers couldn't take her son to get help against his will, even though mental health professionals and a judge ordered it.

Democrats in Washington state approved the law, known as House Bill 1310, as part of an ambitious police reform package that followed the protests for racial justice that swept the nation in 2020. The law's goal was to make it less likely police would use force unnecessarily or against the wrong person.

It aimed to do that by restricting the use of force to cases where officers have probable cause to believe someone committed a crime or there is an imminent threat of injury — a standard found in no other state — and mandating they use de-escalation techniques when possible.

But the law has backfired on some of the state's most vulnerable residents, including Ostrander's son — partly because it's unclear, and partly because of how it has been interpreted by police, who had warned the reforms could bring unintended consequences.

There have long been calls for alternatives to police responding to mental health and substance abuse crises; sometimes, the presence of officers can exacerbate a situation. A new emergency number — 988 — is launching nationally this summer to better coordinate such responses.

But police are still needed. In Washington, unarmed mental health professionals known as designated crisis responders can have people detained for evaluation if they pose a danger to themselves or others.

House Bill 1310, however, includes no exceptions authorizing police to use force to help them. Police frequently took that to mean they were not authorized to do so.

Lawmakers are now rushing to fix that.

House Bill 1310's prime sponsor, Rep. Jesse Johnson, has proposed a bill making clear officers can use force to detain people for involuntary treatment or protective custody. Johnson's bill passed the House 90-5 on Friday and heads to the Senate.

Instead of being evaluated in late November, when a judge issued a mental health warrant for his detention, Ostrander's son spent 25 days homeless. He repeatedly refused to go with his mom or officers.

Only on Jan. 4 did he make it into treatment, when he was arrested in Des Moines, south of Seattle, for assaulting his mother.

"I said, 'I don't get it, why won't you help him?'" Ostrander said. "I thought, are the police just doing this to use me as a pawn to get their story told, or what? It's about my son's life here."

Police had warned that House Bill 1310 could hinder their ability to respond.

The measure restricted when they could use physical force, but left unclear how to define that. Could they render first aid or take a child into protective custody, or would that be using force on someone without probable cause? What about putting hands on someone in mental crisis to get them onto a gurney?

Attorney General Bob Ferguson's office issued a memorandum in August aimed at addressing such fears. It said nothing in the new law limits police in responding to community caretaking calls.

For many cities, that wasn't good enough. Given the new accountability legislation made it easier to decertify police, departments did not want their officers to be the first to test whether using force to respond to noncriminal mental health calls was inbounds.

This month Ferguson issued a further, formal opinion. It acknowledged House Bill 1310 was confusing.

But when it comes to detaining people in crisis, Ferguson said, using force “may very often” be authorized when mental health professionals have determined they pose an imminent threat.

For Ostrander, the attorney general’s analysis cemented a belief that given a choice between reasonable interpretations of the law, police departments chose the one that would protect themselves from potential liability, instead of the one that would allow them to best help people in crisis.

Steve Strachan, the executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, emphasized neither the attorney general’s opinion nor the August memo was binding, and police must carry out the law as written.

“Nobody wants this,” said Strachan, who himself serves on the board of a behavioral health agency in Kitsap County. “Everyone is frustrated — certainly behavioral health specialists, certainly the families involved and certainly law enforcement.”

Officer Denis Molloy, of the Lynnwood Police Department’s community health and safety section, called navigating the reforms challenging.

“People call 911 for help; we want to help them,” Molloy said. “Now we have to triage it and say, are we going to go out there or not? ... Because if it goes downhill, people are going to say, why were the police there?”

As a result, when crisis responders ask police to detain patients, they might not come. If they do, they might go to great lengths trying to persuade a patient to get help — but decline to take a patient who’s unwilling to go.

Even where mental health professionals see an imminent threat, law enforcement might not; the person might just be sitting on a couch, refusing to leave.

In one case, police declined to detain a man; a week later, he stabbed someone, said Kitsap Mental Health Services CEO Joe Roszak.

Roszak said he understood police concerns, but added: “These are individuals who need to be picked up because we anticipate they will commit a crime or hurt themselves or hurt others.”

In October and November, crisis responders documented 51 times when police declined to respond or to help transport a patient, according to the Washington State Health Care Authority.

That number understates the problem: Some health agencies stopped calling police when they knew officers wouldn’t show up or detain patients.

“Unfortunately it means people aren’t getting into treatment at a really critical juncture,” said Joan Miller, of the Washington Council for Behavioral Health. “We were pretty taken aback after House Bill 1310 passed and police stopped responding to calls.”

Day after day, Ostrander drove around looking for her son, bringing him food or clothes. He refused to go with her or with officers who reached out with meals and encouragement.

As a severe cold snap approached, Ostrander turned to lawmakers, including Rep. Tina Orwall, a longtime social worker who represents Des Moines.

On Christmas Eve, Orwall found Ostrander’s son and bought him a burger. A few days later she set him up with a hotel room paid for by the city.

The hotel booted him after a week for disruptive behavior. Ostrander went to pick him up. He was delusional, vowing to kill police and firefighters, but he agreed to take a ride.

	<p>At a red light, he began punching her. Two construction workers called police.</p> <p>He was taken to jail and transferred that night to an emergency room, then later to a behavioral health hospital.</p> <p>Orwall, a Democrat, said she respects the Legislature’s police reform work, but wishes House Bill 1310 had been clearer.</p> <p>“I know we’re going to fix it, and fix it soon,” Orwall said. "But it came at such a human cost.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Seattle plan: give police bldg. to BLM group</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/as-police-were-abandoning-spd-east-precinct-seattle-officials-drafted-plan-to-give-station-near-chop-to-a-black-lives-matter-group/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/as-police-were-abandoning-spd-east-precinct-seattle-officials-drafted-plan-to-give-station-near-chop-to-a-black-lives-matter-group/</a>
GIST	<p>At the height of Seattle’s racial justice protests in 2020, then-Mayor Jenny Durkan’s administration <a href="#">drafted legislation</a> to transfer the Police Department’s East Precinct building to a Black Lives Matter activist organization and researched relocating the station’s operations, newly released documents show.</p> <p>That June, as cops lobbed tear gas from behind barricades, and protesters on the streets surrounding the precinct called for the Police Department to be defunded, Durkan’s office behind the scenes briefly contemplated handing over the multimillion dollar property that had become the focus of the demonstrations.</p> <p>Calvin Goings, the director of the city’s Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS), <a href="#">emailed</a> three memos and a draft resolution to Durkan on the afternoon of June 8, 2020 — at about the same time police were abandoning the East Precinct on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>The draft resolution for transferring the property to Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County (BLMSKC) included a July 1 effective date, and Durkan’s office subsequently discussed the possibility with the nonprofit, which at one point pushed to remake the building as a hub for public health and community care.</p> <p>“Good afternoon Mayor, Please see the attached documents as requested. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns,” Goings wrote at 3:10 p.m. on one of the most chaotic days in recent Seattle history, after more than a week of confrontations between police and protesters that the Durkan administration was struggling to control.</p> <p>The summer of 2020 was an impactful period, yet many City Hall deliberations — such as work on a potential East Precinct transfer — happened behind closed doors, leaving journalists and residents in the dark. <a href="#">Text messages exchanged among a number of key decision makers</a>, including Durkan and her police and fire chiefs, have gone missing.</p> <p>More than a year and a half later, the East Precinct memos, obtained by The Seattle Times this month through a records request, are the only details that City Hall has publicly disclosed about the potential transfer, shedding some light on an idea that Durkan has since distanced herself from. They’re already playing a role in at least one lawsuit against the city, brought by businesses and residents over the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP).</p> <p>The city didn’t end up transferring the East Precinct property, which police reoccupied on July 1, 2020. Durkan, whose term expired last month, dropped the idea after “the very preliminary work by FAS and the realities of policing confirmed it was neither feasible nor in the best interest of public safety,” Chelsea Kellogg, a spokesperson for Durkan, said in an email last week.</p>



BLMSKC ultimately supported a position held by the Rev. Harriett Walden, a community leader who spoke out in favor of police returning to the building, Kellogg added. [Walden noted](#) that the first Black member of the Seattle City Council, Sam Smith, had supported the establishment of the East Precinct, which opened in 1986 [after years of controversy](#).

BLMSKC was not closely involved with the protests on Capitol Hill, nor with the CHOP. Walden didn't know about conversations with the mayor's office about transferring the East Precinct building to BLMSKC, she said this month.

Police Department officials also weren't included in the conversations, according to spokesperson Sgt. Randy Huserik. "We were not aware of any plans on the city's part to permanently leave the precinct, or any plans to share the space with the community," he said in an email Friday.

In a recent deposition, former Deputy Mayor Casey Sixkiller said the Durkan administration nixed the East Precinct transfer possibility after the activists decided they didn't want the property. It was a coincidence that the draft resolution was shared on the same afternoon the precinct was abandoned, Sixkiller said.

The Times contacted BLMSKC board members about the matter.

"Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County will not make a statement at this time," board member Anthony Canape said in an email Monday.

The Durkan administration's work on a potential East Precinct transfer didn't surface publicly until Sixkiller was deposed and until former Police Chief Carmen Best mentioned the matter in a book last year.

Since then, Durkan representatives have denied the building was offered and downplayed the notion that City Hall seriously pursued a transfer, attributing the idea to some demand letters from activists and to City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, who on June 11, 2020, tweeted she would sponsor legislation to convert the property into a community center.

"There was no plan to transfer the East Precinct and from the time SPD made the decision to temporarily evacuate the precinct for safety reasons, it always planned to return," Kellogg said.

But the FAS memos from June 8, 2020, demonstrate that Durkan's office was interested in a transfer before the precinct was abandoned and before Sawant weighed in. A June 15 letter from BLMSKC demanding a transfer and offering to contribute millions of dollars to repurpose the building was circulated by mayoral staffers. And additional FAS memos from June 17, 2020, indicate the administration continued for more than a week to explore the possibility of permanently relocating East Precinct police operations.

Kellogg suggested Durkan didn't ask for the June 8, 2020, draft resolution.

"Interesting that you assume and state that the Mayor asked for a draft resolution on this property when that is not how the process works," she said. "FAS oversees both city owned property and many real estate deals."

FAS spokesperson Melissa Mixon said the mayor's office triggered the work.

"The Durkan administration directed FAS — in its capacity as the city's real estate and facility management agency — to outline the process to transfer the East Precinct to BLMSKC," Mixon said this month.

### **June 8, 2020**

The evacuation of the East Precinct on June 8, 2020, followed more than a week of intense protests, including standoffs over multiple nights between police and protesters at barricades around the precinct.



Durkan ordered Best to have the barricades removed and to allow protesters to pass by. Instead, the precinct was abandoned and many protesters lingered in the area, setting up what came to be called the CHOP.

Durkan and Best denied they were involved in the decision to leave the precinct but never publicly named who was responsible. According to a report released in October by the city's Office of Police Accountability (OPA), Assistant Chief Tom Mahaffey ordered the evacuation. In interviews with OPA, he gave conflicting accounts as to whether he directly informed Best.

One of the June 8, 2020, memos from FAS reviewed options for [moving the physical contents of the precinct](#); a second memo explored [alternative sites](#) for the precinct's operations; and a third memo looked at [transferring the precinct building](#) to BLMSKC. Attached to the third memo was "proposed language that the Mayor could use for a resolution to transfer the property."

The resolution included "whereas" clauses that established the reasons for the transfer, including: "This precinct houses Seattle Police officers who patrol Seattle's Central District neighborhood and has been seen as a symbol of police oppression in one of Seattle's historically Black neighborhoods. This property is valued in excess of \$5,000,000."

The resolution then stated: "The City transfers permanent use/ownership of ... the East Precinct to Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County, effective July 1, 2020. The City of Seattle agrees to vacate the property and remove all law-enforcement materials and police-related facilities ..."

The memo that focused on the physical contents of the precinct building recommended the city hire a contractor "if a move is called for."

The memo that focused on alternative sites reported that "a 24-hour search (for expediency)" had turned up no properties available for lease with enough space and recommended the city hire a broker to conduct a more thorough search. Attached to the memo were a list of properties available for lease and a list of city-owned properties where portables could be hosted, "if portables are identified as the solution." The memo also suggested the city could buy or lease a different building for community use, rather than disrupting police operations.

The memo that contemplated the handover to BLMSKC recommended additional work be done with the City Attorney's Office to draft property-transfer documents and to ensure that all tax implications were considered.

### **What happened**

The existence of the East Precinct transfer documents [bubbled up last year](#) in the CHOP lawsuit by businesses and residents. The plaintiffs want to make a connection between the potential transfer and the precinct's evacuation.

[In his deposition](#) for that case, Sixkiller acknowledged that Durkan was contemplating the transfer idea, thinking along the lines of the Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center established after Native American activists in 1970 occupied decommissioned Fort Lawton. But he recalled "expressing to her that while she may have a strong desire to put this on the table as a conversation point with folks, that it's not ready." Sixkiller added: "I can't imagine that anybody actually asked for a resolution to be drafted," attributing the legislation to the FAS director's "can-do spirit."

The plaintiffs in the CHOP lawsuit included the draft resolution to transfer the precinct and other records as exhibits in a motion filed this month that seeks to certify the federal lawsuit as a class action, attorney Angelo Calfo said this month.

Best also mentioned the possibility of the precinct transfer in her book, published in October. Activists told the former chief that "someone in the mayor's office had offered them keys to the building, but the BLM leaders did not want to take it over," she wrote.

On June 15, 2020, a letter from BLMSKC to Durkan and other leaders demanded the precinct be ceded to the organization as part of a process to repurpose the building with Public Health—Seattle & King County for community needs. BLMSKC offered to contribute \$2 million for renovations and \$4 million to help support operations.

“We demand an active, responsive resource and tool that works for us, not one simply handed off for political expediency,” the letter said, adding, “One of our goals in reclaiming the East Precinct for this use is to quiet the physical space and surroundings. Protesters need a reprieve. They need to know that demands have been met ...”

In an email that day about the letter, then-Deputy Mayor Shefali Ranganathan noted to other top mayoral staffers that “they are willing to bring \$ to the table.”

On June 17, 2020, an FAS staffer [sent additional memos](#) about the East Precinct to members of Durkan’s cabinet, including [a memo that explored “interim site options”](#) for the precinct’s police operations.

“In the event that the SPD East Precinct operations do not move back to the Capitol Hill location, it will require at least 1-2 years to develop a new long-term site,” that memo said, recommending a property at 1130 Rainier Ave. S. as a suitable interim site.

Another June 17 memo looked at the possibility of co-locating police and community functions at the East Precinct property.

After a weekend of shootings in the CHOP, Durkan announced June 22, 2020, that the police would go back to the East Precinct building, and on July 1, 2020, they returned. In a news conference that day, Durkan said Walden would be “leading outreach” about the future of the East Precinct.

“I truly believe we can reimagine the space, a shared space, including a community room in the East Precinct and things in and around Capitol Hill,” Durkan added.

Walden hadn’t agreed to lead any outreach, she said later that month. Nothing came of the idea for community space in the East Precinct.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Where profits soar most for home sellers
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/where-profits-are-soaring-most-for-home-sellers-in-washington-hint-its-not-seattle/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/where-profits-are-soaring-most-for-home-sellers-in-washington-hint-its-not-seattle/</a>
GIST	<p>The pandemic real estate market is subjecting homebuyers to crowded tours, runaway bidding wars and heartbreak.</p> <p>For sellers, it’s offering a chance to cash out.</p> <p>Profits soared last year for home sellers all over the country, including in Washington, according to new data released this week. Nationally, the median profit margin of 45% was the highest since 2008, according to Attom Data Solutions, a firm that tracks real estate data.</p> <p>“2021 will go down as one of the greatest years for sellers and one of the toughest for buyers,” said Todd Teta, the firm’s chief product officer, in a statement.</p> <p>In Washington, that was especially true in suburbs and small cities, where buyers went in search of cheaper prices and more space — in some cases, far from Seattle.</p> <p>The median profit in Spokane and Spokane Valley hit \$162,350 last year, or an 86.5% margin between the price a homeowner paid and the price they resold their house for, according to Attom.</p>

“The competition is much more fierce” in the Spokane housing market than five years ago, when Windermere agent Samara Behler started in the business, she said.

“I think of clients back then who bought a house for \$215,000. That house is now worth probably close to \$400,000.”

In Bremerton, home sellers’ median profit reached \$215,000, or about 83%, according to Attom. In the Olympia-Tumwater area: \$175,000, or about 65%. In the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metro area, the median was \$264,606, a margin of about 73%. (Attom analyzed property records to compare the price a home sold for and the price its sellers paid when they bought it. The figure doesn’t represent homeowner expenses, such as property taxes or remodeling.)

The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metro area saw some of the highest profits in the country, both in the dollar amount and the profit margin, according to Attom. That’s no surprise, because home prices are so high here. But the change in those metrics from 2020 to 2021 was less dramatic in Seattle than in Spokane or Bremerton.

“Prices on resale weren’t increasing much faster than they had been going up when 2021 sellers originally bought their homes. That was around six or seven years ago, on average,” Teta said.

Homeowners are staying in their homes longer than they were in 2000, but that measure is on the decline, according to Attom’s data. In the Seattle area, for example, the average homeowner at the end of 2021 had been in the home about 6 1/2 years, compared to about 10 years at the same time in 2020 and six years in 2000.

The jump in profits for home-sellers in cities such as Spokane and Bremerton underscores the explosion of suburbs and smaller cities, where many buyers are seeking more affordable homes.

That squeezes residents who already live in those areas or who have less to spend. The median home sold in [Spokane County](#) for \$370,000 last year, up about [23%](#) from a year earlier, according to the Spokane Association of Realtors.

The majority of Behler’s clients are locals, and about a quarter are from out of town, drawn by the potential to get more for their money, she said.

“Although for locals the affordability is a struggle,” Behler said, “a lot of people coming in from out of the area find Spokane to be very affordable.”

Despite the potential for big financial gains, some homeowners all over the state have hesitated to list their home for sale, worried about trying to find a new house in the same market.

“There are so many different variables that go into that one decision to sell your home, which seems like a great idea at first, but everything thereafter has a lot of risk and pressure involved,” Behler said.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Confusion: mandate, lawsuit, ruling, appeal
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=style&amp;live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#confusion-abounds-amid-legal-back-and-forths-in-the-us-over-some-local-mask-mandates">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=style&amp;live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#confusion-abounds-amid-legal-back-and-forths-in-the-us-over-some-local-mask-mandates</a>
GIST	<p>Mandate. Lawsuit. Ruling. Appeal.</p> <p>Across the United States, some state and county pandemic policies have been contested in court, overturned and reinstated again from one day to the next, often leaving residents with a sense of whiplash.</p>

Take Douglas County, Neb., home to the state's largest city, Omaha. When county officials [issued](#) a temporary indoor mask mandate for the city, to take effect on Jan. 12, the state attorney general sent a letter to the county's health director the same day telling her that he would sue to block the mandate from being enforced.

His request for an injunction was denied by a district court judge on Tuesday, so the mandate stays in place for now, but state officials are continuing to challenge it in court.

"We felt we were on solid legal ground, and we're pleased with the judge's decision," the health director, Lindsay Huse, said in a statement. "The health department has and will continue to work tirelessly in this battle against Covid-19, and we hope that with everyone's cooperation we can soon return to normal."

Continuing court fights in other states this week illustrate just how elusive such cooperation can be.

In New York, an indoor mask policy was ruled unconstitutional on Monday, then reinstated on Tuesday [when an appeals court judge](#) temporarily stayed the lower court's ruling. That was after state officials had already told school administrators to continue enforcing the rule for students and teachers anyway. (The mask policy was part of a mandate imposed by the governor that [requires masks or proof of full vaccination](#) at all indoor public spaces statewide.)

In New Rochelle, N.Y., the school district [said](#) early Tuesday that masks were no longer required. Later that day, it [announced](#) that masks were once more required indoors, adding "this guidance may change again quickly."

In Iowa, it was a state law against school mask mandates that became a legal pingpong ball. Parents of disabled students had sued in federal court to block enforcement of the law, and a district court judge granted them an injunction. But a federal appeals court partly overturned the injunction early this week, [sending the case back](#) with instructions to limit the injunction's effect to schools with disabled students. The Iowa attorney general said on Tuesday that the state would seek to appeal that ruling, too.

Uncertainty also reigns in Virginia. On Monday, an order took effect that made masks optional in schools. Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, issued the order on his first day in office, saying parents should be allowed to decide for themselves whether to send their children to school in masks. More than half of the state's school districts are still requiring masks for all students inside schools, according to a [Washington Post analysis](#), and seven, including the state's largest, [are suing](#) him over the issue. The state's Supreme Court could issue a ruling in the case within days.

Pennsylvania's Supreme Court [threw out](#) a statewide school mask mandate last month, and some school districts there have ended their face mask requirements.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 England: vaccines vulnerable children 5-11</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#uk-covid-vaccine-vulnerable-children-ages-5-to-11">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#uk-covid-vaccine-vulnerable-children-ages-5-to-11</a>
GIST	<p>Around half a million children in England will become eligible for a first dose of a coronavirus shot on Monday, as the National Health Service <a href="#">extends its vaccine rollout to children ages 5 to 11</a> who are considered most at risk of contracting the <a href="#">virus</a>.</p> <p>Those children who are deemed clinically vulnerable, or who live with someone who has a weakened immune system, will be offered a low-dose form of the <a href="#">Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine</a> in two shots, set eight weeks apart.</p> <p>The pediatric formulation of the Pfizer vaccine contains one-third of the adult dose and was <a href="#">approved</a> by the British medicine regulator last month.</p>

Britain in December 2020 became the first country in the world to [kick off a mass coronavirus vaccination campaign](#), but expanding the program to children has happened at a slower pace. It began offering a first dose to children aged 12 through 15 in [September last year](#) and the authorities have not yet made any decision on when all children aged 5 through 11 will become eligible for a first dose.

Since November 2021, the United States has fully vaccinated more than five million children in the 5-to-11 age group, though [health experts are concerned](#) that the rate of vaccination for children has stalled.

The number of children in England testing positive for the coronavirus increased from the start of this month to the week ending Jan. 22, according to the latest figures from Britain's [Office for National Statistics](#), with the highest percentage of cases in children ages 2 to 11. That has happened despite a drop in overall cases since Britain's daily [caseload peaked](#) at over 190,000 at the beginning of this month, a surge fueled by the Omicron variant.

"We know vaccines give significant protection against severe illness from Covid — including the Omicron variant, so it is important that our youngest and most at-risk get protected," the deputy lead for the N.H.S. England vaccine program, Dr. Nikki Kanani said in a [news release](#) on Sunday.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Impact West Coast dockworkers cases rise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#more-west-coast-dockworkers-tested-positive-in-january-than-in-all-of-2021">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#more-west-coast-dockworkers-tested-positive-in-january-than-in-all-of-2021</a>
GIST	<p>More longshoremen on the West Coast contracted the coronavirus in the last month than in all of last year, putting additional pressure on backed-up ports struggling to keep up with the flow of imports, according to the Pacific Maritime Association.</p> <p>At least 1,850 longshoremen had the coronavirus in January, surpassing the 1,624 cases recorded in all of 2021, the maritime group said.</p> <p>"It's a heavy impact," said James McKenna, the president of the group, which negotiates labor agreements for 70 companies at 29 West Coast ports.</p> <p>The twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which account for around 40 percent of United States imports, were particularly hard hit. The cases there accounted for about 80 percent of the 1,850 infections reported as of Thursday, Mr. McKenna said on Friday.</p> <p>The startling high number comes as 90 container ships off the San Pedro Bay coast, a record number, were waiting to come into port in Los Angeles and Long Beach, as of Friday. The dockworker absences are helping exacerbate a monthslong bottleneck. "Before the pandemic, you wouldn't have any ships waiting, they'd come in and come out," Mr. McKenna said.</p> <p>The rise in cases among the dockworkers somewhat parallels the surge of the Omicron variant across California, which now is apparently flattening.</p> <p>Federal and state authorities have designated port workers as essential workers during the pandemic because of their critical role in maintaining the nation's supply chain. There are 23,000 longshoremen working in West Coast ports, and 15,000 in Los Angeles and Long Beach.</p> <p>The year began with about 150 new cases reported per day among dockworkers on the West Coast. By mid-January, that rate decreased to about 100, and by Friday it had fallen to about 60 new cases per day.</p> <p>One positive test, though, ensnares multiple workers, as contact tracing identifies others who will have to quarantine. "It has a ripple effect across the work force," Mr. McKenna said.</p>

	<p>A record volume of cargo arrived on the West Coast in 2021, colliding with the advent of the Delta variant. At least 16 longshoremen died in 2021 and many more were hospitalized.</p> <p>Omicron so far has packed a less powerful punch, Mr. McKenna said. There have been no deaths this year, he said, and longshoremen are less frequently hospitalized or are being released quicker than in the past.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Ticking clock: Miami's condo empire</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/01/28/magazine/miami-condo-collapse.html">https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/01/28/magazine/miami-condo-collapse.html</a>
GIST	<p>On a bright afternoon in June, James McGuinness arrived in the lobby of Champlain Towers South, one of the tallest condo towers in Surfside, just north of Miami Beach. Like its sister building, Champlain Towers North, the South tower was built in 1981, in the midcentury modern style so beloved by Florida developers of the era: squat and unlovely, with an L-shaped Duplo block footprint and heavy concrete balconies that jutted from the 13-story structure. Out back, there was a garden, and beyond the garden, the sea.</p> <p>Although McGuinness had been the chief building official in Surfside for less than four months, he knew Champlain Towers South well. And not only because he lived in an apartment complex nearby: Between late May and late June, he made four previous trips to Champlain South, where the condominium board was upgrading the building's "swing-stage supports" — the roof-mounted anchors used by professional window-washing crews. This trip, on June 23, would be his fifth and last.</p> <p>"In retrospect, you look back at that moment — you search your memory," McGuinness told me recently. "But I didn't notice anything unsafe. I would never have stayed up there if I had." Together with the building manager for Champlain Towers South and a trainee from Surfside's building-inspection unit, McGuinness walked the perimeter of the roof, assessing the anchor placements. The day already felt uncomfortably hot, and the breeze, blowing at 15 miles an hour toward the ocean, did little to make things more pleasant. They said their goodbyes and rode the elevator back to the lobby.</p> <p>Around 1:45 a.m., McGuinness was awakened by the buzzing of his mobile phone on the bedside table. The voice on the line belonged to Jason Greene, the assistant town manager for Surfside. There'd been an incident at Champlain Towers South. "Partial collapse, multiple fatalities — that's all he could tell me," McGuinness said. Outside, the air was choked with smoke and particulate debris as fine as snow; emergency vehicles were shrieking up Collins Avenue, the multilane thoroughfare that runs almost the entire length of Miami Beach.</p> <p>McGuinness rounded the corner and felt the air leave his lungs. The building upon which he stood the previous day had nearly vanished. In its place was a heap of concrete and steel. "There was this tremendous gap in the horizon staring back at me," he said. "An unspeakable scene. Unspeakable horror. That's all I could think, even then: It was unspeakable."</p> <p>The next afternoon, while rescue crews searched for survivors, McGuinness appeared at an emergency meeting of the Surfside Town Commission, a body made up of the mayor, vice mayor and other elected officials. By the end of the day, at least one person was pronounced dead, with 99 residents from the condo's 135 units reportedly unaccounted for; the final count would land at 98, making it <a href="#">one of the deadliest engineering failures in the history of the United States</a>. Standing at the microphone, clad in a white polo shirt and slacks, McGuinness warned of a coming reckoning — one that would play out across the entire country. "This terrible tragedy, which is a national tragedy, is going to change the building codes as they relate to certification and all existing buildings," he said. "Because we've got to remember, it's not only the building itself. It's what the building is sitting on that also counts, big time. Especially in the coastal environment."</p> <p>But meaningful reform, of the kind McGuinness imagined, has long been notoriously hard to enact. Florida has roughly 1.5 million residential condo units — among the most of any state — and a highly lucrative condo and co-op industry with many powerful players, from management companies and developers to firms specializing in condo law. Historically, these groups, and the lobbyists who represent</p>



them, have successfully pushed back against any policy they view as constrictive or unduly expensive. And already, just months after the collapse of Champlain Towers South, there are signs that similar efforts are underway. “You’d hope that this is the wake-up call,” Steven Geller, a longtime state senator and representative, told me of Champlain Towers. “But I’d anticipate the same thing we’ve seen since the 1980s. The same thing, incidentally, that you see with mass shootings, or at least mass shootings back when they were rare. The lobbying groups go out and go: ‘Listen, now is really not the time to deal with this. Now is the time to pray and heal. Let’s talk about it next year.’ Then next year comes around, and guess what? It’s old news. Let me tell you: I want to be wrong, but my experience says, ‘Be realistic.’”

Pull up a map of the Florida coast, drop your finger onto the surface and you’ll almost certainly land on a town or city with its own disaster in the making. According to one recent study, 918,000 of Florida’s condo units are, like the ones in Champlain Towers South, more than 30 years old; many towers were thrown up during the boom years, when oversight was lax, developers were incentivized to prize speed over attention to detail and every permit was a rubber stamp away. Even in the most rigorously built structures, secured to the face of the earth by heavy pylons driven through yards of shifting sand, the coastal environment has inevitably taken its toll. Facades are pitted by the salt and sea air. Balconies are crumbling. Pool decks are spidered with cracks. And water — and rising sea levels — are a fact of life. Water on the roads, water slopping up and out of the drains, water in subterranean garages and the very foundations of condo towers packed with hundreds of residents who are frequently blind to the dangers that lie underfoot or, more tragic still, unable to fund the repairs that could save their lives.

And time is running out. “It is a ticking-clock scenario,” Eric Glazer, a veteran condo-law specialist told me. “A bomb got set off, back in the day, and it’s about to go off.”

**As recently as** the 1890s, the nine-mile barrier island now known as Miami Beach was little more than a fetid tangle of swampland, dominated by the remains of a handful of old coconut and avocado plantations. All had failed spectacularly. The heat was tremendous, the rain torrential, and as for the local fauna, it appeared to consist entirely of violent bugs. “The mosquitoes were biting every exposed inch of me,” Jane Fisher wrote in her memoirs, recalling a visit she made in 1912, with her husband, Carl, a wealthy developer. But Carl refused to be deterred. “I’m going to build a city here,” he proclaimed. “A city like magic. Like romantic places you read and dream about, but never see.”

There was precedent for what Fisher had in mind. Two decades earlier, the oil baron Henry Flagler had extended his Florida East Coast Railway all the way to Miami, largely on the backs of poor Black inmates “leased” from local jails. (Miami was almost called “Flagler,” he later claimed, until a rare moment of humility spurred him to suggest the honor go instead to a local Indigenous tribe, the Mayaimi.) As Flagler’s rail line rolled south, massive hotels cropped up in its wake, including the Royal Palm, an opulent resort built in 1897 in Miami. On Miami Beach, Carl Fisher vowed, he would replicate their grandeur. But in order to do so, he would have to play God and entirely reshape the landscape.

A wooden bridge spanning Biscayne Bay was already under construction; Fisher chipped in some funds to ensure its completion and hired a crew of Black laborers, “armed with saws and axes,” to scrub the beach clean of stubborn vegetation. “They worked hip-deep in the mud, a pall of smoke hanging over them because smudge pots and bonfires of palmetto fiber were the only available defense against clouds of mosquitoes and sandflies that made life miserable for men and mules alike,” the Miami journalist and conservationist Polly Redford recalled in a 1970 book, “The Billion-Dollar Sandbar.” “When the many-branched mangrove roots proved ruinously expensive to remove, they were cut off two feet above the mud and left there for dredges to cover later on.”

Far too late would residents of Miami Beach come to appreciate the cost of eradicating the mangrove forests, which function like natural storm walls, mitigating tidal damage and blocking high winds. Less immediately shortsighted was Fisher’s insistence on dredging six million cubic yards of wet sand from the bottom of Biscayne Bay and depositing it on the west side of the barrier island. (Redford wrote: “A week or so was necessary for this soup to congeal enough to support much weight, and during the filling of Belle Isle” — off the island’s southwestern flank — “two mules fell into it, and drowned.”) By 1916, Miami Beach had nearly doubled in width, giving Fisher far more seaside real estate to develop and sell;



by 1931, dozens of artificial islands had sprouted up in the bay. “So thoroughly did founding father Fisher and his crews erase most traces of nature,” the Miami Herald reporter Andres Viglucci noted last year, “that it’s easy to forget today, as Miami Beach marks its centennial as an incorporated city in characteristically hyped-up fashion, just how completely a manufactured place it is.”

The hitch with manufactured places, of course, is that they tend to need constant care. Conjure a “magic” city from sand, and you better be prepared to make sure it doesn’t vanish back into sand again. Hence the canals gouged into the island in the 1920s to relieve coastal pressure and counter flooding; the barge-loads of crushed limestone required to undergird the island’s first roads; and the appearance of bulkheads, or retaining walls, along the shore.

Fisher succumbed to a gastric hemorrhage in 1939, but the push-and-pull between developers and nature would continue for decades after his death, often in familiar ways, but sometimes in entirely novel permutations. A filled-in beach eroded, so more of the ocean floor was siphoned up to replace what the sea had reclaimed. Rising tides overwhelmed drains, so more complex systems were installed, along with pumps that funneled street water back into the bay, where they created dangerous algae blooms. Floodwater sluiced through a basement, so the house was jacked up. Ditto the parking lots, ditto the roads.

“If you were from the Beach, it was just part of life,” a friend, Buz Waitzkin, who grew up in the area in the 1950s and 1960s told me. “You’d ride along Biscayne Bay, and there were those giant dredges literally creating islands. And if there was a big storm, your street turned into a small creek. For days after a hurricane, our house got sloshed and sprayed so many times by drivers that we had to put a big sign out front: ‘Cars! Watch your wake!’”

When I arrived at my hotel on Miami Beach, this past October, a construction crew was busy raising the adjacent boulevard. The work had been going on for close to three years, the hotel’s receptionist said wearily: “But I’ve been told it’s either that or we turn into Atlantis.” (He offered me a cocktail coupon as an apology.) According to some estimates, the race may be winnable in the short term, but it won’t be cheap: The city estimates that the cost of [protecting Miami from rising tides over the next 40 years will total nearly \\$4 billion](#). And even that staggering effort might not be enough. “There are some areas where you run the model now and you plug in the recommended pump stations and outfalls and wells, you will find minimal to no change with hundreds of millions of infrastructure,” Miami’s deputy chief resilience officer, Chris Bennett, recently reported. “There are cases where your engineering solutions just won’t provide you any benefit.”

**If you were to plot** out the history of development on Miami Beach, you would see two significant spikes. The first arrived with Carl Fisher and ended with the Great Depression. The second came after World War II, as a new wave of developers, taking advantage of the growing popularity of air travel, resuscitated Fisher’s idea of Miami Beach as a playground for the rich. The island, the editors at Life magazine noted in 1947, “offers an impressive menu of *divertissement*: horse racing, dog racing, swimming, deep-sea fishing, shopping, sunbathing, gambling, nightclubbing, astrology, speedboating (sailing, being more strenuous, is not so popular), pretty girls and a climate which insures ‘359 warm, sunny days out of 365.’”

“I’ve got this old postcard, and it kind of explains it all,” Eliot Kleinberg, a local historian and former Miami-area reporter, told me. “The frame on the left has a guy standing next to a snowman, and he’s shivering. But in the frame on the right, he’s in the sun, and he’s grinning, and he’s got a bikini babe on each side of him. It’s really a distillation of what Florida was to previous generations. And you absolutely can’t underestimate what kind of power it had. People wanted to be here. Needed to be here. Florida was a magnet, and if you lived in Boston or New York or Philadelphia, or wherever, and you wanted warmth and sun, you got pulled along.”

In 1940, Florida’s population was about 1.9 million. In 1950, the number was just shy of three million. “Then you fast-forward a little more, and there are 22 million people here,” Kleinberg recalled. “I watched it happen. It wasn’t pretty. It was pretty if you were a contractor, but it wasn’t pretty if you loved the natural world. Everything vanished so fast you could almost see it happen with the naked eye. I look back

with great nostalgia and sorrow at that time. I really do. We created homes for 22 million people but paid a tremendous cost for it.”

In other parts of Florida, there was enough land for developers to build *out*, in tessellating planned communities that often extended no more than a couple of stories in height. But on Miami Beach — both Miami Beach proper, which had been incorporated as a city in 1915, and in nearby communities such as Bal Harbour or Surfside — there was only one direction to go. Through the 1960s, new towers sprung up along the beach, many of them zoned for condominium use. So unfamiliar was the word — the Federal Housing Administration did not approve insurance for condos until 1961 — that one local newspaper felt compelled to define “condominium” for its readers: “It is what persons who like apartment living — but want to own property complete with a title — have been waiting for.” If Carl Fisher’s vision for Florida had hinged on luxury for the extremely wealthy, the appeal of the condo was essentially democratic; a middle-class retiree with enough savings could afford the same sea view and beach access as a millionaire. (Air-conditioning, which was becoming more widely available, ensured that condo living was comfortable, even in crowded, multistory towers.)

But in their rush to meet demand, developers often cut corners when it came to construction materials or the all-important substructures that kept buildings stuck to the ground — a hazard given the frequency of violent storms on the Florida coast. “It was the wild, wild West,” a longtime Miami engineer named Eugenio Santiago told me. “You had ground being broken every day, and the permitting people were completely overwhelmed. They’d review the calculations you submitted, and they tried to catch things, but stuff was always going to slip through the cracks. Then you’d have the guys who’d just take a glimpse and rub their hands on the paper, sign it and hand it back.” (Santiago’s account is supported by a contemporary interview with a retired building official who told *The Miami Herald* that a lot of inspection practices in the boom years were “a fiasco, a joke” and not “worth a damn.”)

In 1974, a grand jury empaneled by Miami-Dade County reviewed complaints from residents about the quality of local construction and returned with an indictment of the overly friendly relationship between many developers and municipal officials — and the political pressure being exerted on code inspectors. Local leaders, the report warned, “must wake up to the fact that Building Departments are to be established for the protection of the consumer and not solely to bring revenue to the City and County.”

Two grand-jury investigations followed, in 1976 and 1990, each more damning than the last. (The 1990 report, the most strident in tone, included an account of a woman who complained about incessant leaks, until one afternoon the entire roof collapsed.) Record-keeping was lax to nonexistent, the juries found; as for the inspectors, they were often unqualified and just as often conspicuously lazy — some had conducted drive-by “inspections” without ever leaving their cars.

**It wasn’t until** Hurricane Andrew, in 1992, which killed 61 people and destroyed billions of dollars of property, that lawmakers were jolted into forming a governmental panel, the Lewis Commission, to investigate building practices in the state. “The history of Florida mirrors the history of America, in the sense that you can look back and see all these obvious problems that no one is paying attention to because they have dollar signs in their eyes,” Kleinberg, the historian, said of the commission. “Then a tragedy happens, and someone comes in and fixes it.” The commission later issued nearly 100 recommendations on strengthening local building codes. Among them: state-mandated structural analyses of any tower or complex more than 40 years old.

A 40-year recertification program, which had been in place in Miami-Dade County since the mid-1970s, was later adopted by Broward County, a coastal area that encompasses Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood. There is little doubt the policies have made Florida safer. But it has also explicitly placed the burden and responsibilities of the maintenance of older buildings onto owners themselves — with predictable results. “Look, maintenance takes effort, right?” says Allyn Kilsheimer, the engineer hired by Surfside to investigate the Champlain collapse. “And then it costs money to hire an engineer to conduct the re-inspection in the first place, and then it can cost *a lot* of money to do the required work.” And frequently, owners balk at the expense.

“I’ll never forget going out to this condo complex on the water, with a contractor, and looking at the corrosion on some of the columns in the garage,” Eugenio Santiago told me. “It wasn’t horrendous. I proposed removing the corroded concrete and wire and pouring new concrete — the price would have been about \$3 million. The guy looks at me like I’m crazy. A decade passes. I hear from someone at the same building. I go back. The damage is worse. I say, ‘Now it’s a \$20 million job.’ Basically, you pay now or pay later, and many people chose option No. 2.”

The realities of the modern condo board complicate matters significantly: Although the original residents of a building may have insight into how a structure is built, later owners are typically left in the dark about the state of repairs. Once they purchase a unit, they don’t want to be held financially liable for wear and tear they didn’t inflict or improvements they may not benefit from. “I use the green banana metaphor,” says Bill Sklar, a lawyer and law professor who has been working on condo issues in Florida since 1980.

“An older person goes to the supermarket and sees some green bananas. But she buys the yellow ones, because she’s not sure she’s going to be around long enough to see the green bananas ripen. Now apply that to a condo resident,” he went on. “Well, if you’ve \$1,500 in the bank, you take your grandkids on a vacation to Disney World. Or you take them on a cruise.” And you vote *no* on authorizing the repairs. Over the years, would-be condo-law reformers in the Florida Legislature have focused much of their energy on the policy surrounding reserves — money set aside for repairs — and so-called “reserve studies”: an estimate of how much money should be set aside, based on an engineer’s evaluation of the building. But few of these proposals have made it out of committee and onto the floor for a vote. Fewer still have been signed into law. “It took on a predictable pattern,” says Steven Geller, a commissioner for Broward County who spent 20 years as a state senator or representative. “Someone would come along and try to strengthen the laws as they pertained to reserves. And then the law firms representing condo boards would fight back. They wanted to keep their clients. And their clients — the boards or the condo associations — didn’t want to pay when they thought they shouldn’t have to.” Several Florida law firms were involved in this kind of lobbying, but none more prominently than Becker, a Fort Lauderdale firm that one former Republican state representative, Julio Robaina, has described as the “nemesis” of condo-law reformers. (“Becker strongly refutes any accusation that the firm has opposed community-association reform at any point in its history,” Gary C. Rosen, the Becker managing shareholder and chief executive, said in a statement.)

“A big firm like Becker, or a major lobbying group, they can pay for charter buses and pack them with board members and send them to Tallahassee,” Geller told me. “Suddenly, you’re a legislator in a committee room that sits 200 people, and 180 of them are wearing red shirts indicating their opposition to your legislation. And let’s be honest, all right? That does affect legislators. It affects the governor and the cabinet. And it affects the outcome of the proposal.”

In 2008, for example, Robaina sponsored a bill requiring condo boards to pay for a new reserve study every five years. The bill was signed into law, but in neutered form: In the 11th hour, lobbyists representing condo associations insisted that boards be able to waive the requirement by a simple majority vote. Two years later, in 2010, the law was repealed in its entirety — largely, Robaina has claimed, because of pressure from lobbyists and firms like Becker. According to current and former legislators that I interviewed, this has been a familiar dynamic in Tallahassee in recent decades. Reform bills are advanced, lobbying groups coalesce in opposition and one way or another, the legislation is killed.

“The Florida government, for years, has allowed this to go on, has allowed all these buildings to go up, with little preparation for the day when they get old and need repairs,” Eric Glazer, a Florida lawyer, told me recently. Glazer, who writes [a popular blog about Florida condo law](#), recalled attending a 2018 board meeting at a condo complex for senior citizens in Fort Lauderdale. On the agenda that night was an assessment of \$300 per owner to address plumbing problems in the units. “I can’t tell you how many people came up to me afterward, crying, weeping, saying, ‘We can’t afford it,’” Glazer said. “I went home that night, and I wrote emails to as many state legislators as I could, and begged them to do something. I said, ‘Look, the state of Florida is about to be in a tremendous, tremendous amount of trouble.’”

As it happens, that same year, a similar drama was playing out on a much larger scale at Champlain Towers South — a building with a tangled condo-boom history of its own. According to The Miami Herald, one of the general contractors on the project, [Alfred Weisbrod, later lost his state license](#) after an investigation into complaints involving “incompetency or misconduct”; the building’s developer, Nathan Reiber, pleaded guilty to tax evasion and was accused of “false and deceptive” entries in company records. In early 2018, Frank Morabito, an engineer working for the condo board, conducted an inspection that revealed crumbling concrete on the ground floor and significant corrosion to the rebar that helped support the structure. Of particular concern to Morabito was the concrete slab that underlaid the pool deck; the original builders, Morabito concluded, had made a “major error” in not canting the slab, which would have prevented water from collecting in the building’s substructure. To correct this error, together with other necessary repairs to Champlain South, would cost approximately \$9 million, Morabito estimated. (Through a representative, Morabito and his associates declined to comment.) But the Champlain South board had nowhere near that amount in reserve. For a year and a half, the owners and board members bickered over how to proceed; many residents supported raising money to pay for the proposed fixes, but others recoiled at the steep costs. The infighting grew so bitter that most of the board eventually resigned.

“This pattern has repeated itself over and over, ego battles, undermining the roles of fellow board members, circulation of gossip and mistruths,” the chairwoman of the board, Annette Goldstein, wrote in her resignation letter. “I am not presenting a very pretty picture of the functioning of our board and many before us, but it describes a board that works very hard but cannot for the reasons above accomplish the goals we set out to accomplish.” Eventually, in 2020, several new board members were elected, and a proposal was approved: Champlain Towers South would take out a \$12 million line of credit from a Miami bank to address the most pressing of the suggested repairs. Several months later, half the building shuddered into dust.

**Champlain Towers South** fell at 1:20 a.m. on June 24. By 5 that morning, the survivors had been escorted to the Surfside Community Center, a half mile to the north, where they were joined by evacuated patrons of an adjacent hotel and dozens of relatives of Champlain residents. “From that point forward, we were all moving nonstop, and we essentially didn’t stop moving for a week,” James McGuinness recalled. Media gathered three rows deep on the periphery of the collapse site; everywhere residents went, there was a mic or camera in their faces. The phone in McGuinness’s office, on the ground floor of the Surfside town hall, rang nonstop. There was no shortage of condo towers in Surfside as old or older than Champlain South. Could those structures be on the verge of collapse, too? “Everyone was suddenly acutely aware of every crack and crevice in their building,” McGuinness said. “I would describe the level of panic and nervousness as extremely elevated.”

To try to ease residents’ minds, McGuinness drafted a memo, asking “owners of buildings over 30 years old and over 3 stories in height to begin assessing their buildings for recertification in advance of their 40-year deadline.” McGuinness delivered many of the documents himself, sometimes adding a handwritten note at the top: “Don’t wait. Accelerate!! *No esperé. Aceleré!!* We are aggressively ‘in front of the fix!’”

On Friday, June 25 — the same day as the emergency meeting — McGuinness, Kilsheimer and other officials and lawyers gathered in a conference room to discuss what may have caused the collapse. Among the documents that were reviewed was a stack of email correspondence between members of the condo board and Ross Prieto, McGuinness’s predecessor as Surfside’s chief building official. “Seeing those emails was a holy-[expletive] moment,” said Eliana Salzhauer, a first-term commissioner who had come to the offices to speak to McGuinness and Kilsheimer. “Like, ‘How did we not know about this?’”

The emails showed that Prieto had been sent the report submitted by Frank Morabito, the engineer hired by Champlain Towers South. Prieto never responded in writing, but he informed the condo board that the building was “in very good shape,” according to minutes from a board meeting. (Prieto declined to comment for this article.) Salzhauer was also troubled by an exchange between Prieto and a condo-board member named Mara Chouela, who had complained to Prieto about construction at an adjacent lot, a Renzo Piano-designed condo tower to be called Eighty Seven Park. Residents reported feeling tremors in Champlain South, and Chouela sent a photo of a large backhoe working right next to Champlain’s parking

garage and pool deck. Could a town official come check? “There is nothing for me to check,” Prieto fired back. Surfside directly borders Miami Beach, and the construction site fell under that town’s purview.

In November, at a Starbucks in Surfside, Salzhauer pulled out her iPhone and showed me some of the information that had since emerged on the Eighty Seven Park site. The city of Miami Beach, several media outlets had reported, had amended its height regulations to accommodate the construction of the 18-story building. And the developers had been allowed to take ownership of the street between Champlain Towers South and Eighty Seven Park, which is how the backhoe that Chouela spotted got so close to the former building. Survivors and relatives of victims of the collapse have since filed a lawsuit claiming the work on Eighty Seven Park contributed to the tragedy. The developers, in turn, point to the condo board at Champlain Towers South as the problem. “As numerous media reports have documented, Champlain Towers South was improperly designed, poorly constructed, significantly underfunded and inadequately maintained and repaired,” David Weinstein, a lawyer for the developers said. He expected that “a full review of the facts and the ongoing investigation” by the federal government would “affirm” the developer’s position.

Salzhauer told me that she wasn’t yet sure what to make of the allegations regarding Eighty Seven Park. “But I do know one thing: We’ve got to stop being passive and start being proactive,” she said. As a comparison, she cited the response to the Ford Pinto in the 1970s, when it was discovered that the model was prone to explosions in rear-end collisions: “We found the life-threatening defect, and the car was pulled off the road.” She added: “Now I’m not saying that we need to evacuate every old building in Surfside. But I am saying that we need to have more regular inspections and we need to change the way we’re measuring safety. Because we’re learning so much about sea-level rise and climate change and we’re realizing that a lot of our old measures are outdated.”

In commission meetings last summer and fall, Salzhauer, a television producer and former prosecutor, has pushed Surfside to modify its re-inspection program and pay for subterranean analysis along the beach, which might help identify geological weaknesses that could threaten other buildings. Just weeks after the collapse in Surfside, Boca Raton had already passed its own ordinance requiring 30-year recertification of condo towers and apartment buildings over three stories or 50 feet in height; the Surfside commission did not formally consider a similar proposal from Salzhauer until mid-January. (It will go to a vote in February.) Salzhauer told me that members of the commission had been reluctant to act until they knew exactly what happened.

But a definitive answer as to the cause of the collapse, if it ever comes, is likely to be years away: The National Institute of Standards and Technology, the federal body in charge of the investigation, recently said it was processing rock and soil samples from the site, along with “a review of historic, geologic, design and construction information,” but stopped short of providing a timeline for completion. And Allyn Kilsheimer, Surfside’s own investigator, has struggled to get access to the site. In November, the Surfside commission passed a motion providing additional funding for the investigation, but according to Salzhauer, it was a struggle to even get it to a vote.

**The collapse of Champlain Towers South** has had a polarizing effect on residents of Surfside, who have found themselves stuck between two camps: those who want to act decisively to strengthen local and state condo policy and those who regard it as an expensive infringement on their liberty.

“When you first called me, you said you were interested in understanding how the community responded to this tragedy,” Salzhauer told me. “But I’ll be honest. I think the real story now is, how does the community *not* respond? Certain people seem to want to forget, to move on. I understand that impulse; it’s self-protective. But that doesn’t make it right. I mean, we had nearly a hundred human beings die here.”

I later learned that Salzhauer’s “certain people” included one very prominent figure: the mayor of Surfside, a real estate investor named Charles W. Burkett, currently serving his third nonconsecutive term in office. (He won his most recent election, in March 2020, by a margin of exactly 50 votes out of a little more than 1,200 cast.) Salzhauer and Burkett have never gotten along. In June of 2020, in an exchange covered widely in the local press, Salzhauer flipped off Burkett, who had muted her during a heated commission

debate over proposed anti-hate legislation. (Burkett wanted to add “evangelical Christians” to the list of protected groups.) She has subsequently described Burkett as a “pig”; she suggested to me that the mayor was politically disinclined to pursue the kind of reform that might upset conservative business interests in the state.

The national scrutiny over the Champlain Towers tragedy hasn’t helped their relationship. At one commission meeting that I attended, the pair talked at each other, but never to each other, in increasingly tense tones. “I would say that the mayor and the commissioner represent different extremes in terms of what needs to be done,” one municipal employee, who requested anonymity in fear of retaliation, told me. “Which can often make it difficult to get things done.”

Burkett, who has expressed interest in running for governor, prefers to give interviews to Fox News, but in November, he agreed to a “friendly chat” at his home on the west side of Surfside. He showed me into his living room, which is dominated by picture windows that frame Biscayne Bay as neatly as a watercolor portrait. “Paradise,” he smiled happily.

Burkett’s viewpoints can be hard to pin down. He told me that he accepted the reality of climate change — he’d seen with his own eyes that the sea levels around his private dock were climbing. And he was as wary as anyone about the pace of development in Miami Beach, where, he stressed, the towers rise so high that some residents rarely catch a glimpse of the sun. He was determined to keep the “small town” feel of Surfside any way he could, he said.

But when it came to the collapse, he was unequivocal: It was a true aberration, unlikely to be repeated. “I’ve said this publicly: this doesn’t happen in America,” he told me. “There’s something really wrong here. Really wrong. Listen, I’m a real estate guy, and I’ve been around buildings my whole life. As a matter of fact, I started my career doing historic renovations in South Beach on those Art Deco buildings down there. I did a bunch of them. I understand how buildings are built and how they stand up. And, you know, it was my contention that you wouldn’t have had to lift a finger for four years and that building still shouldn’t have fallen down. There was a trigger, there was something that happened.”

Burkett referred me to a tweet purportedly sent by John McAfee shortly before the software magnate’s death in a Spanish prison, which claimed that he’d stored dozens of terabytes of secret information “in my condo near 88th Street and Collins Avenue just north of Miami Beach” — the cross streets of Champlain South. Had someone set off a bomb in the building to prevent McAfee’s secrets from being revealed? “It’s not conclusive,” Burkett allowed. He said he’d seen The Miami Herald refer to the tweet as “likely fake.” But “likely fake,” Burkett went on, “means potentially real.” He told me that he had pleaded with law enforcement to get in touch with executives at Twitter to get to the bottom of the matter. “If it’s not real,” he said, “we check the box and we move on. Nobody’s done that.” (Several news organizations have concluded McAfee did not send the message or own a unit in Champlain Towers; the “tweet” in question was probably doctored.)

It’s easy to see why this line of reasoning appeals to Burkett. If the collapse was a freak event, current and potential residents will fret less over the safety of Surfside’s buildings. And less money will need to be expended on the type of initiatives floated by Salzhauer and her supporters. “When you demand more compliance — and that’s not to say that we *weren’t* demanding compliance, it’s just it wasn’t being enforced — but when you demand it and you enforce it, that’s going to drive prices up,” Burkett told me.

“And of course, then, you’re squeezing the balloon here and you’re going to puff it up over there. What’s the result of that? Housing is not going to be affordable. So you’re going to displace a lot of people.” Burkett wasn’t necessarily opposed to more enforcement, he said, but he believed residents should go into the discussion with their eyes wide open as to the costs. Once the cause of the collapse had been determined, “and it could be shown that that building fell for a certain reason, that would give us certainty, but we have no certainty. The uncertainty right now is creating a plethora of different sort of” — he steepled his fingers before finishing his thought — “reactive situations.”

Salzhauer had used the Ford Pinto to make her argument for pursuing code reform. Burkett opted for a different analogy. “It’s sort of like what toxic mold was to real estate 25 years ago,” he said. “Toxic mold was a concoction of the media and trial lawyers. But I know as an apartment-building owner for years and years, we were all frightened to death of toxic mold. You could lose your building; they would shut you down. The guys with spacesuits would have to come in, and it was this whole sort of theater. And in the end, there really wasn’t toxic mold. There was mold that was bad, and there were cases where there were infestations of mold.” But the issue wasn’t as widespread or urgent as it was made out to be, he said. He continued: “When you try to say, ‘Everything is the worst,’ you lose the argument. You lose people.” “So when you apply that to Champlain Towers?” I asked.

“I think that it goes back to the fact that we don’t know why the building fell down,” he said. “And it leaves us with many unknowns, and it allows the imagination to race and go into places where it never would have otherwise gone. And imagine all kinds of terrible things.”

**While the local press** has been busy tracking every new flap in the Burkett and Salzhauer saga — the mayor recently made the Miami New Times’s 2021 list of Worst People of the Year — a different and far more consequential legal battle has been playing out at the state level.

A couple weeks after the fall of Champlain South, a task force was convened by the Florida Bar to discuss potential changes to condo law in the state. Bill Sklar, the longtime condo lawyer, had been named chairman. “I’ll give you the one-minute conclusion: Unlike commercial buildings, unlike office buildings, unlike city and county buildings — unlike residential buildings — condo associations have no standardized, baseline maintenance protocol,” Sklar told me. “No inspection standard or requirement,” in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties outside the 40-year recertification program. “Too much is being left up to chance.”

Among the recommendations collected by Sklar’s task force are an inspection schedule for condo boards; standardized maintenance protocol; and a mandatory minimum reserve for every Florida condo. Although there is no reason to believe that “any significant percentage” of the state’s condos are “not well maintained,” the report reads, “the Task Force finds the lack of uniform maintenance standards or protocols, and the broad discretion given to boards to determine when, how and if life-safety inspections and necessary repairs should be performed, requires legislative intervention.”

Crucially, the most potentially controversial aspect of the Florida Bar’s report — the mandatory minimum reserve — was not given the same priority by the authors of a different report published last fall, this one from the government of Broward County. For good reason, says Steven Geller, who is serving as the task force’s chairman: A minimum-reserve statute would be unlikely to pass. “You’ve got to understand that I’ve been through this,” Geller told me. “I’ve watched mandatory-reserve legislation get introduced. I’ve watched them fail. There are a lot of people in this state who believe that Big Government — that’s pronounced ‘Big Gummint’ — shouldn’t be telling them what to do in their ‘castle.’ And then you’ve got the lobbies and law firms. You’ve got to go in with what will actually pass, and anything that’s seen as draconian isn’t going to cut it.”

On the off chance something substantive does make it through the Florida Legislature, it would still have to go to Gov. Ron DeSantis for a signature. “And that’s a long shot,” says Jason Pizzo, a state senator whose district encompasses Surfside. “The governor, I’m guessing, would not like to deal with any of this during the 2022 election cycle. We’ve got millions of people vacationing in Florida in condos, and if you start taking harsher measures, that could get costly and unpopular.” In recent years, Pizzo has introduced several bills trying to tighten and reform condo codes in the state; none of the legislation has even made it to committee. Still, Pizzo has pressed forward with a new bill, called S.B. 880, that would require condo associations to regularly post inspection results to the building’s website and to respond rapidly and in full to any resident requests for additional safety-related information. It hasn’t been scheduled for a vote.

Pizzo, who told me that it was the “worst kept secret in the world” that lobbyists had used their influence to scuttle previous bills, was realistic about the root causes of the predicament in which Florida finds itself: It will take money to prevent another Champlain Towers South and money to ensure all older condos in



the state meet code. And no one is racing to open their pockets. “You come out of a tragedy like this, and it’s absolute outrage, and people are furious,” Pizzo told me. “I can see a world in which policymakers and legislators get together and say, ‘Hey, guess what, we’ve got a solution, and it’s the following: You’re going to have to pay an extra \$120 a year to your condo association.’ And people just go, ‘Screw that!’”

One recent afternoon, I had coffee with a Surfside resident named Robert Lisman, who lives with his wife and their young children in Champlain Towers East, a smaller, newer cousin building to the South and North towers. Lisman had been following the progress of bills like Pizzo’s carefully. “The thing I keep hoping is that what we’ve just been through — nearly 100 people who fell asleep and had a building fall on them — is enough of a nightmare to bring change,” he told me. But echoing Salzhauer’s sentiments, he added that he sensed a lot of “forgetfulness happening.”

In late June, just days after the collapse of Champlain Towers South, Lisman tracked down the building manager for Champlain East and asked if anyone had reported any problems with his tower. He told me the building manager paused, as if he was considering how to respond. “Finally, he goes, ‘All right, come with me.’” Lisman said. “We go down to the garage.” The manager pointed to a column, which was sufficiently cracked to expose a few tendrils of rebar. Lisman stared. Residents of Champlain South, he knew, had also complained about damage to the columns in their garage. “But the manager said: ‘Don’t worry. I called a structural engineer, and he said for me to hit it with a hammer, and if it sounds hollow, you’ve got a problem,’” Lisman recalled. The column wasn’t hollow, the manager said. He asked Lisman not to cause alarm among other residents.

A few days later, Lisman persuaded James McGuinness to have the column inspected; the walk-through, conducted by Allyn Kilsheimer, revealed “nothing that indicated the possibility of immediate collapse.” But as Kilsheimer stressed to me, he does not have the ability to see through concrete. A walk-through was just that — it was no stand-in for a substantive analysis. When an engineering firm hired by the Champlain East Board finally issued its own report, it left Lisman with more questions than answers. The building appeared generally sound, the firm said. But residents only had access to preliminary reports, and at board meetings, the board members, accompanied by a lawyer for Becker, “only talked about the good parts,” Lisman said. “If they have nothing to hide, they should be able to speak and be transparent to residents.”

Lisman is now part of a class-action lawsuit filed against Champlain Tower East’s board; the suit, which he declined to discuss in-depth, claims that the condominium board has neglected upkeep of the building, thus devaluing the worth of the individual units. (Champlain Towers East did not respond to requests for comment.)

For now, Lisman, like thousands of condo-unit owners across the state, finds himself stuck in a nightmarish predicament — one with profound personal and financial implications. To give up on Champlain Towers East and move to a newer building on the South Florida coast would almost certainly be restrictively expensive: Median house prices are soaring; the real estate market is sloshing with investor cash. But the dangers of staying put are potentially even greater. Because not only does staying mean jousting with a recalcitrant board protected by expensive lawyers or being saddled with repair bills the reserve funds are unable to cover, it also means accepting the twinned threats of climate change and rising tides. It means living in an aging building on an artificially widened sandbar that erodes a little more every year. It means *risk*, not just of losing your home but maybe even of dying in it, in another unspeakable tragedy.

“When we bought the unit, we thought we’d live there forever,” Lisman says. “And then one day, I’d give the apartment to my kids. The idea of leaving or moving out wasn’t something that ever crossed my mind,” he says. “At this exact moment, I’m determined to stay. But five years down the line? Ten years? That I can’t tell you.”

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HEADLINE	01/29 Indonesia braces: 3 <sup>rd</sup> Covid wave
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-wave-looms-indonesia-omicron-spreads-82549205">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-wave-looms-indonesia-omicron-spreads-82549205</a>

GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Indonesia is bracing for a third wave of COVID-19 infections as the highly transmissible omicron variant drives a surge in new cases, health authorities and experts said Saturday.</p> <p>The country reported 11,588 new confirmed infections and 17 deaths on Saturday in the last 24-hour period. It was the highest daily caseload since August when Indonesia was struggling to contain a delta-driven wave.</p> <p>Indonesia had recovered from last year's spike that was among the worst in the region, and daily infections had fallen to about 200 by December. But cases are rising again just weeks after the country reported its first local omicron transmission.</p> <p>"The upsurge will be extremely fast. ... We will see a sharp rise in the near future," Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin told a news conference Friday, adding that the current wave would likely peak at the end of February or in early March.</p> <p>He said the government dedicated more beds for COVID-19 patients, ramped up tracing and testing and intensified vaccinations in all regions. But some health experts doubt the measures will be enough given the lax enforcement.</p> <p>Bed occupancy rates in the capital, Jakarta, the epicenter of the omicron outbreak, rose from 5% in early January to 45% on Saturday, said Jakarta Deputy Governor Ahmad Riza Patria. He said "omicron is moving too quickly" in the city, where more than 80% of the 10 million residents have been vaccinated.</p> <p>Pandu Riono, an Indonesian epidemiologist and academic adviser to the government, said Indonesians are still traumatized from the delta variant when many died in isolation at home or while waiting to receive emergency care as hospitals were swamped.</p> <p>During last year's surge, hospitals erected plastic tents as makeshift intensive care units, and patients waited for days before being admitted. Oxygen tanks were rolled out on the sidewalk for those lucky enough to receive them, while others were told they would need to find their own supply.</p> <p>Riono said a third wave would be unlikely to push Indonesia's health care system to the brink because omicron generally causes less severe symptoms than delta.</p> <p>President Joko Widodo on Friday urged asymptomatic patients to self-isolate at home for five days and to use telemedicine services through which they can access doctors, medicines and vitamins for free, or to visit a community health center.</p> <p>"This is important so that our health care facilities can focus on treating patients with more severe symptoms or patients of other diseases that need intensive care," Widodo said.</p> <p>Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Griffith University in Australia, said a third wave is inevitable as long as a large portion of Indonesia's population remains unprotected against COVID-19. As of Friday, only 61% of Indonesia's 208 million people eligible for shots were fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Overall, Indonesia has reported more than 4.3 million infections and 144,268 deaths from COVID-19.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Court upholds Calif. net neutrality law</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/blow-telecoms-californias-net-neutrality-law-upheld-82540427">https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/blow-telecoms-californias-net-neutrality-law-upheld-82540427</a>
GIST	A federal appeals court has upheld California's net neutrality law, rejecting an attempt by telecommunications industry groups to prevent the state from enforcing it.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling, which means the status quo stays and the state can continue to enforce the law. This means California can continue its ban on internet providers slowing down or blocking access to websites and applications that don't pay for premium service.

California's net neutrality law was signed by former Gov. Jerry Brown in 2018. That came after regulators during the Trump administration killed federal net neutrality rules designed to prevent AT&T, Comcast, Verizon and other major internet providers from exploiting their dominance to favor certain services or apps over others.

In response, seven states and Puerto Rico enacted their own net neutrality policies. The most expansive effort of this sort was in California, which started enforcing the law last year, with potentially significant consequences for the rest of the U.S.

The Trump administration sued to block California's 2018 law, preventing it from taking effect for years, but the Biden administration has dropped that lawsuit.

On Friday, proponents of net neutrality cheered the court's decision, but called for federal net neutrality laws.

"This win is significant because it offers protections to people in our most populous state and drives the national conversation forward," said Matt Wood, vice president of policy and general counsel of consumer advocacy group Free Press, in a statement. "Yet tremendous as it is, we still need the Biden FCC to reclaim its authority not just for nationwide open-internet rules, but for policies promoting affordable, resilient, just and reasonable internet connections for everyone."

Big telecom companies oppose the stricter regulation that comes with the net neutrality rules and have fought it fiercely in court. They say the regulations can undermine investment in broadband and introduce uncertainty about what were acceptable business practices.

They say they prefer a national approach to a state-by-state one, but the industry has fought prior federal net neutrality rules. But with a Senate divided 50-50 between the parties, legislation in Congress may not draw enough support to pass.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Powerful winter storm hits northern Europe</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/storm-malik-hits-northern-europe-force-dead-82563165">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/storm-malik-hits-northern-europe-force-dead-82563165</a>
GIST	<p>HELSINKI -- A powerful winter storm swept through northern Europe over the weekend, killing at least four people, destroying houses and cars, closing bridges and causing flooding and halting transport while leaving thousands of households without electricity.</p> <p>Storm Malik was advancing in the Nordic region on Sunday, bringing strong gusts of wind, and extensive rain and snowfall in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.</p> <p>Malik reached the Nordic region and northern Germany late Saturday after moving in from Britain where it caused havoc with material damage and transport chaos, hitting Scotland particularly bad.</p> <p>In the U.K., a 9-year-old boy in Staffordshire, England, and a 60-year-old woman in Scotland were killed Saturday by falling trees as strong winds battered northern parts of Britain.</p> <p>Wind gusts of more than 100 mph (160 kph) have been reported in parts of Scotland, causing widespread disruption to transport and leaving tens of thousands of homes without power.</p> <p>Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon said that while scores have had power reconnected, power disruptions will continue for many because another storm is due to hit the region on Sunday.</p>

	<p>In Denmark, strong winds with heavy rain caused the temporary closure of several bridges on Saturday including the key Oeresund road and rail bridge connecting Copenhagen and the Swedish city of Malmo.</p> <p>Danish media reported that a 78-year-old woman died from severe injuries after falling in strong winds. In neighboring Germany, local media reported that a man was killed on Saturday after being hit by a billboard that was loosened by the storm.</p> <p>Flooding in many parts of Denmark caused substantial material damage. Several traffic crashes caused by falling trees and flying debris were reported to police.</p> <p>Southern parts of Sweden were badly hit, too, and thousands of households were without electricity by Sunday afternoon. Ferries to the Baltic Sea island of Gotland were canceled because of strong winds.</p> <p>Severe damage to houses, cars and boats, among other things, were reported in Norway while heavy snowfall throughout Finland caused road crashes and disrupted bus and train traffic in parts of the country.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 NKorea: missile capable of striking Guam</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/korea-confirms-test-missile-capable-striking-guam-82571329">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/korea-confirms-test-missile-capable-striking-guam-82571329</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea confirmed Monday it test-launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of reaching the U.S. territory of Guam, the North's most significant weapon launch in years, as Washington plans steps to show its commitment to its Asian allies.</p> <p>Sunday's launch could be a prelude to bigger provocations by North Korea such as nuclear and long-range missile tests that pose a direct threat to the U.S. mainland, as the North tries to further pressure the Biden administration to win sanction relief or international recognition as a legitimate nuclear state.</p> <p>The official Korean Central News Agency said the purpose of the test was verifying the overall accuracy of the Hwasong-12 missile that is being deployed in its military.</p> <p>KCNA published two sets of combination photos — one showing the missile rising from a launcher and soaring into space and the other showing North Korea and nearby areas that it said were photographed from space by a camera installed at the missile's warhead. The Associated Press decided not to use the images because the authenticity of the photos couldn't be verified.</p> <p>Lee Choon Geun, a missile expert and honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute, said he thinks the photos were taken from space — especially when the missile was soaring to its apogee, though he cannot independently prove there was no adjustment on the images. While it's rare to place a camera on a weapon, Lee said North Korea likely wanted to demonstrate its technological advancement to both foreign and domestic audiences.</p> <p>North Korea said the missile was launched toward waters off its east coast on a high angle to prevent flying over other countries. It gave no further details.</p> <p>According to South Korean and Japanese assessments, the missile flew about 800 kilometers (497 miles) and reached a maximum altitude of 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles) before landing between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.</p> <p>The reported flight details make it the most powerful missile North Korea has tested since 2017, when the country launched Hwasong-12 and longer-range missiles in a torrid run of weapons firings to acquire an ability to launch nuclear strikes on U.S. military bases in Northeast Asia and the Pacific and even the American homeland.</p> <p>The Hwasong-12 missile is a nuclear-capable ground-to-ground weapon with a maximum range of 4,500 kilometers (2,800 miles) when it's fired on a standard trajectory. It's a distance sufficient to reach Guam,</p>

home to U.S. military bases that in past times of tensions sent advanced warplanes to the Korean Peninsula in shows of force. In August 2017, at the height of animosities with the then-Trump administration, North Korea threatened to make “an enveloping fire” near Gaum with Hwasong-12 missiles.

In 2017, North Korea also test-fired intercontinental ballistic missiles called Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 that experts say demonstrated their potential capacity to reach the mainland U.S. Some analysts say North Korea still needs to conduct additional ICBM test-flights to prove it has overcome the last remaining technological hurdles, such as protecting a warhead from the extreme heat and pressure of reentering the Earth’s atmosphere.

In recent months, North Korea has launched a variety of weapons systems and threatened to lift a four-year moratorium on more serious weapons tests such as nuclear explosions and ICBM launches. Sunday’s launch was the North’s seventh round of missile launches in January alone, and other weapons tested recently include a developmental hypersonic missile and a submarine-launched missile.

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said the Hwasong-12 launch was seen as partially breaking North Korea’s weapons test moratorium. In April 2018, when North Korea suspended nuclear and ICBM tests ahead of now-dormant diplomacy with the Trump administration, Kim said North Korea didn’t need to test intermediate-range missiles any longer as well.

Cheong said North Korea will likely test-launch its existing long-range missile if the United States spearheads fresh sanctions on it. Other experts said North Korea could conduct a nuclear test as well.

North Korea has publicly vowed to add more powerful ICBMs and nuclear warheads in its arsenal. They include a longer-range ICBM with precision strike capability, a solid-fuel ICBM that improves a weapon’s mobility, a multi-warhead missile, a spy satellite and a super-sized warhead.

After Sunday’s launch, White House officials said they saw the latest missile test as part of an escalating series of provocations over the last several months that have become increasingly concerning.

The Biden administration plans to respond to the latest missile test in the coming days with an unspecified move meant to demonstrate to the North that the U.S. government is committed to allies’ security in the region, according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity.

The official said the administration viewed Sunday’s missile test as the latest in a series of provocations to try to win sanctions relief from the U.S. The Biden administration again called on North Korea to return to talks but made clear it doesn’t see the sort of leader-to-leader summits Donald Trump held with Kim as constructive at this time.

South Korean and Japanese officials also condemned Sunday’s launch, which violated U.N. Security Council resolutions that bans the country from testing ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.

U.S.-led diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear program largely remains stalled.

“Even if Washington had the bandwidth to pay more attention to the North Korean nuclear issue, Pyongyang would likely continue to refuse direct talks because of the pandemic, keep perfecting its weapons technology, and maintain its high price tag for talks,” said Duyeon Kim, an analyst at Washington’s Center for a New American Security.

Observers say North Korea could suspend weapons tests during the Beijing Winter Olympics because China is its most important ally. But they say North Korea could test bigger weapons when the Olympics end and the U.S. and South Korean militaries begin their springtime military exercises.

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SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/guests-ohio-hotel-critical-condition/story?id=82557084">https://abcnews.go.com/US/guests-ohio-hotel-critical-condition/story?id=82557084</a>
GIST	<p>Fourteen guests at an Ohio hotel were hospitalized, including some who are in critical condition, due to a "life-threatening" carbon monoxide leak, police said.</p> <p>Police responded to several 911 calls Saturday evening of people found unconscious around the pool area of the Hampton Inn in Marysville, Ohio, police said. Marysville is a suburb of Columbus.</p> <p>One of the calls mentioned an unconscious 2-year-old girl found in the water, according to police.</p> <p>People were complaining of dizziness and a burning sensation in their throats, police said. Marysville Police Chief Jay Riley confirmed to ABC News that there were "life-threatening levels of carbon monoxide in the pool area." He said officials continue to investigate the source of the carbon monoxide.</p> <p>Memorial Hospital, in Marysville, told ABC News that it received 11 patients from the Hampton Inn -- six of them children. Seven patients were transferred to tertiary care facilities, two of whom are considered "critical." The other five are "serious but stable," said Melanie Ziegler, a spokesperson for the hospital.</p> <p>Three people were sent to Grady Memorial Hospital, two in stable condition and one critical, police said.</p> <p>Two were evaluated at the scene, according to police.</p> <p>The ages of the patients weren't immediately known.</p> <p>"The Hampton Inn Marysville is fully cooperating with the local authorities as they investigate this incident," a hotel spokesperson told ABC News. "Please contact the Marysville Fire Department for additional information."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Debate: likelihood, timing Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/us-and-allies-debate-the-intelligence-on-how-quickly-putin-will-order-an-invasion-of-ukraine-e2-80-94-or-whether-he-will-at-all/ar-AATh4pb">https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/us-and-allies-debate-the-intelligence-on-how-quickly-putin-will-order-an-invasion-of-ukraine-e2-80-94-or-whether-he-will-at-all/ar-AATh4pb</a>
GIST	<p>As Russia masses tens of thousands of troops on its border with Ukraine, along with tanks, artillery and missiles capable of striking the capital, officials in Washington, Kyiv and across Europe are debating the likelihood and timing of an invasion.</p> <p>In one camp, officials in Washington, London and within Ukraine's national security establishment are convinced that a Russian strike is imminent. But Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, is not persuaded that the intelligence Western nations have shown him backs up their dire assessments.</p> <p>Somewhere in the middle, U.S. allies including France, Germany and Norway think Russia could strike but remain unsure of the timing and whether Russian President Vladimir Putin will accept some kind of diplomatic compromise that he can sell as a NATO retreat.</p> <p>Intelligence is rarely predictive, and judging the precise moment when Putin might order his forces over the border is difficult and perhaps impossible, U.S. officials acknowledged. But in recent weeks, they and their allies, including those in Kyiv who do not share Zelensky's sanguine view, have sounded exasperated with the Ukrainian president and his closest political advisers, some of whom have asserted that the White House is hyping the threat of an invasion for ulterior motives.</p> <p>"There is a growing sentiment that the United States is exaggerating the threat for political reasons," one Zelensky aide said, perhaps to force Ukraine to accept Russia's demand that it be barred from joining NATO.</p>



Biden officials have flatly rejected the accusation and stressed that they are providing Ukraine with detailed information about a potentially existential threat. On Friday, as it has day after day, the administration continued to strike an ominous tone.

“The threat is very real and it’s imminent,” John J. Sullivan, the U.S. ambassador to Russia, told journalists. “As President Biden has said, it could happen, given the buildup that we have seen, with very little notice.”

Some officials said Putin might order an attack after the Feb. 20 conclusion of the Olympic Games in Beijing, timing the event so as not to upstage China, an important ally.

At a news conference Friday, Zelensky effectively shrugged. Putin, he said, may have sent upward of 100,000 troops to Ukraine’s border as an act of “psychological pressure.” Regarding intelligence including satellite imagery and other information that shows Russia could deploy up to 175,000 troops, Zelensky said, “If you look only at the satellites, you will see the increase of troops. You can’t assess whether this is a threat, attack or simple rotation.”

Zelensky and his team haven’t ruled out that Russia might invade, and by many outward appearances, Ukraine is preparing for war. The country is receiving shipments of arms and military assistance from allies. Volunteers are training to fight in the streets of Kyiv. Ukrainian intelligence has moved sensitive files and equipment out of its headquarters in the capital to safe locations in the west of the country, according to officials familiar with the matter who, like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive operations.

But Western officials have been unsettled by Zelensky and his team’s public skepticism and what they perceive as his lack of focus.

“There’s this split among his administrative advisers and what he may be hearing from his military and intelligence services,” said a U.S. government official specializing in Russian affairs. “I think Zelensky and his political team are working from their own set of priorities, and they do not necessarily accord with those of the intelligence and military.”

Instead of devoting his full attention to steeling Ukrainian society for a fight, one senior European diplomat said, Zelensky has presided over treason charges against his predecessor, candy baron Petro Poroshenko, who this month flew to Ukraine to defend himself in court. Each man accuses the other of a pursuing a political vendetta.

The fight has further fractured Ukrainian political life at a time when unity is badly needed, the diplomat said, raising questions among NATO allies about how much backing Zelensky would command in Ukraine if a war broke out.

The tone from Zelensky and his team is starting to change, the diplomat said, to one of greater concern. But there is lingering uncertainty about whether the Ukrainians are calibrating their response to reflect what they believe the leaders of NATO nations want to hear.

Yuri Vitrenko, the chief executive of Naftogaz, the largest national oil and gas company in Ukraine, said Zelensky’s outlook that a Russian invasion is not imminent reflects briefings from his top advisers.

“Zelensky’s view is based on the intelligence data we have,” said Vitrenko, who speaks frequently with the president and his top aides.

There are two necessary ingredients for an imminent invasion, he said: a buildup of troops and a political pretext. “Russia still needs a pretext.”

When Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, it cited the movement of Georgian security forces into the separatist enclave of South Ossetia as a rationale for military action. In 2014, it exploited pro-Russian



demonstrations and sent in troops without insignia to take control of Crimea. Vitrenko said Russia's core demand — that Ukraine be barred from NATO — is a beef with the West, not a cause for an assault on Kyiv.

There is uncertainty also in other parts of Europe.

French officials agree with their U.S. counterparts on the danger and scale of the threat from Russia, but there are differences concerning predictions about how imminent a Russian invasion may be, said a French official.

"The appreciation of the threat and the risk is completely shared. The fact that there is huge volatility and risk of miscalculation is completely shared as well, and we are very wary of that," said the French official, who said his government is, however, less certain that an attack will happen soon.

For its part, Germany also remains skeptical of an imminent Russian invasion. At this stage, Berlin sees no indication that Russia will move into Ukraine immediately, a senior German official said. Evidence that Moscow plans to act quickly may exist, but if the United States possesses it, it hasn't shared it with the Germans, the official added.

The official stressed that the Russian military buildup was "very alarming," but without clear indications of what Putin plans to do next, Germany does not want to take any provocative actions. Germany has refused to join other NATO members in sending arms to Ukraine but has emphasized its efforts to stabilize the country's economy as one of its biggest donors.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said Germany will stand with its allies should Russia invade.

"There would be a high price" for Russia, Scholz told reporters.

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said that creating uncertainty is a Putin trademark. "The fact that you get different readings of will there be an invasion or not is exactly what the Russian president wants to happen," he said in an interview. "He wants there to be ambiguity."

Zelensky advisers say the Ukrainian president is also mindful of not inciting a public panic. Were he to echo the bleak White House assessment, they worry he could set off a bank run and capital flight. One aide complained that U.S. financial assistance is being offset by the damage that talk of war is doing to Ukraine's economy.

Public panic also could lead to social unrest, Zelensky advisers fear, and destabilize his administration, perhaps paving the way for Moscow to install leaders more favorable to the Kremlin. Indeed, U.S. and British officials feared Putin was trying such a scheme. Last week, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss publicly accused Russia of organizing a plot to install a pro-Moscow government led by a former member of Ukraine's parliament.

The intelligence underlying that revelation, which also linked some former Ukrainian politicians to Russian intelligence officers involved in planning for an attack on Ukraine, was collected and declassified by the United States, according to multiple people familiar with the matter. The Biden administration asked the British government, which vetted the intelligence and was confident in its accuracy, to publicly expose the Russian plotting, the people said.

U.S. intelligence has assessed that Putin has underestimated how costly an invasion could be in Russian lives lost and in the devastating effects of sanctions on Russia's economy, according to officials familiar with the information.

Intelligence analysts also have concluded that Putin is being misinformed by his own circle of advisers, who appear unwilling to confront him with the full consequences of military action.

	<p>“To me, the idea of invading Ukraine and occupying it in any way, even temporarily, is extraordinarily ambitious and somewhat insane,” said the U.S. official specializing in Russian affairs. “It’s a big country. He may have a plan to defeat the Ukrainian military very quickly. But I think lessons of history should teach him that [success] does not resolve many or even most of the other challenges that he will have taken on.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Beijing seals off neighborhood for 2 cases</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-coronavirus-pandemic-sports-health-china-d1e60d242db347b2b2335c5244f64793">https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-coronavirus-pandemic-sports-health-china-d1e60d242db347b2b2335c5244f64793</a>
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Beijing officials said Sunday they sealed off several residential communities in the city’s northern district after two cases of COVID-19 were found.</p> <p>Residents in the Anzhenli neighborhood in Chaoyang district were sealed off on Saturday, and will not be allowed to leave their compound.</p> <p>Beijing is on high alert as it prepares to host the Olympic Games opening on Friday.</p> <p>While the cases are low compared to other countries in the region, China has double down on its “zero-tolerance” policy, which includes breaking the chain of transmission as soon as it is found.</p> <p>The city is also setting up 19 points in the area to test residents every day until Friday, officials said at a briefing on the pandemic, according to state-backed Beijing News.</p> <p>The Chinese capital reported a total of 12 cases of COVID-19 between 4 p.m. Saturday and 4 p.m. Sunday, said Pang Xinghuo, the vice head of the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control. All those cases came from people who were already under some kind of pandemic control measures.</p> <p>The city conducted multiple rounds of testing for millions of residents this past week in Fengtai district, where some residential compounds were locked down.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Omicron subvariant in nearly half of states</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/28/the-new-bapoint2-omicron-subvariant-is-already-circulating-in-half-of-us-states.html">https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/28/the-new-bapoint2-omicron-subvariant-is-already-circulating-in-half-of-us-states.html</a>
GIST	<p>There are already dozens of cases across almost half of the U.S. of a new Covid subvariant that’s even more contagious than the already highly transmissible omicron variant.</p> <p>Nearly half of U.S. states have confirmed the presence of BA.2 with at least 127 known cases nationwide as of Friday, according to a global data base that tracks Covid variants. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in a statement Friday, said although BA.2 has increased in proportion to the original omicron strain in some countries, it is currently circulating at a low level in the U.S.</p> <p>The subvariant is 1.5 times more transmissible than the original omicron strain, referred to by scientists as BA.1, according to Statens Serum Institut, which conducts infectious disease surveillance for Denmark.</p> <p>The new sublineage doesn’t appear to further reduce the effectiveness of vaccines against symptomatic infection, according to the U.K. Health Security Agency.</p> <p>“Currently there is no evidence that the BA.2 lineage is more severe than the BA.1 lineage,” CDC spokesperson Kristen Nordlund said.</p>

BA.2 overtook the original omicron as the dominant variant in Denmark over the course of a few weeks, said Troels Lillebaek, the chairman of the Scandinavian nation's committee that conducts surveillance of Covid variants.

BA.1 and BA.2 have many differences in their mutations in the most important areas. In fact, the difference between BA.1 and BA.2 is greater than the difference between the original "wild strain" and the Alpha variant, which was the first major mutation to take root across the world.

The BA.2 variant has five unique mutations on a key part of the spike protein the virus uses to attach to human cells and invade them, Lillebaek told CNBC. Mutations on this part of the spike, known as the receptor binding domain, are often associated with higher transmissibility.

The U.K. Health Security Agency on Friday said BA.2 has a "substantial" growth advantage over the original omicron. The sister variant spread faster than the original omicron in all regions of England where there were enough cases to conduct an analysis, according to the agency.

However, a preliminary assessment found that BA.2 doesn't appear to reduce the effectiveness of vaccines any more than the original omicron. A booster dose was 70% effective at preventing symptomatic illness from BA.2 two weeks after receiving the shot, compared with 63% effectiveness for the original omicron strain.

The World Health Organization has not labeled BA.2 a variant of concern. However, WHO officials have repeatedly warned that new variants will arise as omicron spreads across the world at an unprecedented rate. Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's Covid-19 technical lead, warned on Tuesday that the next Covid will variant be more transmissible.

"The next variant of concern will be more fit, and what we mean by that is it will be more transmissible because it will have to overtake what is currently circulating," Van Kerkhove said. "The big question is whether or not future variants will be more or less severe."

Lillebaek said there is not enough data yet to determine whether BA.2 is able to reinfect people who caught the original omicron. However, prior infection would likely provide some crossover immunity to BA.2.

Pfizer and Moderna started clinical trials this week on omicron-specific shots amid growing concern that new variants will emerge as immunity induced by the original vaccines wanes.

New Covid cases are increasing in Denmark, with more than 50,000 new infections reported on Friday in a country of 5.8 million people, according to the country's health ministry. Lillebaek said it's safe to assume that BA.2 is driving the increase of new infections in Denmark right now.

New hospital admissions in Denmark rose by 12 for a total of 967 patients who are Covid positive. Lillebaek said this increase is likely within the limits of what the health system can manage. However, he noted that 80% of Danes are fully vaccinated and 60% have received booster shots.

"If you are in a community or living in a country where you have a low vaccination rate, then you will have for sure more admissions to hospital and more severe cases and then more going to ICU," he said.

In the U.S., about 67% of those eligible are fully vaccinated, according to data from the CDC.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Snowfall records broken across Northeast
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/30/weather/noreaster-bomb-cyclone-storm-sunday/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/30/weather/noreaster-bomb-cyclone-storm-sunday/index.html</a>
GIST	(CNN)The worst of the <a href="#">nor'easter that dumped record snowfall</a> in parts of the East Coast has passed, but "dangerously cold" wind chills were set to stick around in some areas Sunday morning, forecasters said.

Roughly one million people across the Northeast were under winter weather alerts early Sunday, down from the nearly 16 million who were affected by such alerts Saturday night.

"That is a huge drop-off as the storm exits the most populous areas of the eastern seaboard," CNN meteorologist Derek Van Dam said.

Blizzard warnings -- which affected millions across multiple states Saturday -- have also been scaled down to eastern and northern Maine, where more than 240,000 people were affected as of 1 a.m. Sunday, according to the [National Weather Service](#) (NWS).

A blizzard, as defined by the NWS, requires blowing or falling snow, winds of at least 35 miles per hour, and visibility of a quarter mile or less for at least three hours.

Those conditions were reached Saturday in several locations across Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts, including Boston, the [NWS](#) said.

Wind speed -- which reached more than 80 mph Saturday across eastern Massachusetts -- is expected to ease to about 15-25 mph Sunday, though gusts could be higher in some local areas, according to Van Dam.

Still, much of the Northeast can expect "dangerous" wind chills, some dipping below zero Sunday morning as the storm exits the region, the NWS warned. More than 760,000 people from parts of western Virginia through Maine are under those warnings effective until 7 a.m. in some areas and 10 a.m. in others.

Later Sunday, some areas including Buffalo, New York, and Pittsburgh will see temperatures improve by roughly 10 degrees.

Meanwhile, cities including New York, Boston and Philadelphia will see a slight dip of about 4 degrees Sunday.

"Although temperatures are going to rebound (Sunday), we will have to be patient for any real warm up, which doesn't come until the middle of the week," Van Dam said.

The frigid cold follows dense snowfall that broke records throughout the Northeast in parts of southern New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.

The storm became a "[bomb cyclone](#)" Saturday morning, meaning it strengthened rapidly and had the barometric pressure drop more than 24 millibars within 24 hours, the [Weather Prediction Center](#) said.

The storm wreaked havoc on transportation in the region, creating dangerous conditions on roadways and delays and cancellations on air and rail travel.

More than 3,580 flights within, into or out of the US were canceled Saturday, according to [FlightAware](#), and more than a thousand were already canceled for Sunday as of the early morning. Major airlines offered waivers and alternative options to passengers whose travel was affected by the storm.

#### **Record snow and roaring winds**

The bomb cyclone brought heavy snow that accumulated quickly as howling winds blew through the region.

The town of Stoughton, Massachusetts, recorded a staggering 30.9 inches of snowfall by Saturday night, the [NWS](#) said. And winds in parts of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, where Cape Cod is located, reached 81 mph Saturday, the service said.

By Sunday morning, up to 2 feet of snow could fall from Long Island through Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine, CNN forecasters said.

Here are some notable snowfall records:

- **Atlantic City, New Jersey:** The city crushed its all-time January snowfall record by Saturday, reaching a monthly total of 33.2 inches of snow. The prior monthly record of 20.3 inches was set in January 1987. The city's 14 inches of snow Saturday also beat its previous record for the calendar date, which was set in 2014 at 7.3 inches.
- **Boston:** Logan International Airport tallied at least 23.6 inches of snow by Saturday night, said the NWS, making Saturday the snowiest January day Boston has recorded and tying the record for biggest 1-day snowfall total. The previous record was set on January 27.
- **Central Park, New York:** The iconic park saw 7.3 inches on Saturday, beating the previous record for January 29 of 4.7 inches set in 1904.
- **Philadelphia:** The city was hit with 5.8 inches of snow Saturday, beating the previous calendar day record of 5 inches set on January 29, 1904.

### **Power outages remain**

The storm's strong winds lead to downed power lines, leaving thousands still in the dark.

Nearly 65,000 homes and businesses in Massachusetts were without power early Sunday according to [PowerOutage.us](https://www.poweroutage.us), down from more than 88,000 Saturday evening.

High winds and snow pushed over several trees across Nantucket Island while some areas were out of power because of downed wires, island Fire Chief Stephen Murphy told CNN Saturday afternoon. Several roadways were also closed because of flooding, the chief said.

"We do have coastal flooding when we get these kinds of storms, but today was pretty intense," Jason Graziadei, an editor at the local newsletter Nantucket Current, told CNN. "People (are) kind of just hunkering down out here."

Scituate, a coastal Massachusetts town southeast of Boston, had some mild to moderate flooding at high tide Saturday morning, with water splashing over seawalls, town administrator Jim Boudreau told CNN.

In Marshfield, another coastal Massachusetts town, about 4 feet of water came over the seawall at high tide, town administrator Michael A. Maresco told CNN.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 NATO: no plan for combat troops to Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-chief-says-no-plans-send-combat-troops-ukraine-if-russia-invades-2022-01-30/">https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-chief-says-no-plans-send-combat-troops-ukraine-if-russia-invades-2022-01-30/</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON, Jan 30 (Reuters) - NATO has no plans to deploy combat troops to non-NATO member Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday.</p> <p>Asked on BBC Television whether he would rule out putting NATO troops in Ukraine if Russia does invade, Stoltenberg said: "We have no plans to deploy NATO combat troops to Ukraine ... we are focusing on providing support."</p> <p>"There is a difference between being a NATO member and being a strong and highly valued partner as Ukraine. There's no doubt about that."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 China Jan. factory activity growth slows</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/china-jan-factory-activity-growth-slows-demand-wanes-covid-surges-2022-01-30/">https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/china-jan-factory-activity-growth-slows-demand-wanes-covid-surges-2022-01-30/</a>

## GIST

BEIJING, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Growth in China's factory activity slowed in January as a resurgence of COVID-19 cases and tough lockdowns hit production and demand, but the slight expansion offered some signs of resilience as the world's second-largest economy enters a likely bumpy new year.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) registered 50.1 in January, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction, but slowing from 50.3 in December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Sunday.

Analysts had expected the PMI to fall to 50.

The official results contrasted with those in a private survey of mostly small manufacturers in coastal regions, which showed activity fell at the fastest rate in 23 months.

China's economy started last year strong, reviving from a sharp pandemic-induced slump, but it started losing momentum in the summer, weighed down by debt problems in the property market and strict anti-virus measures that hit consumer confidence and spending.

Rising raw material costs and soft demand have also eroded corporate profit margins. Profits at industrial firms rose at their slowest pace in December for more than a year and a half.

With the real estate slump expected to drag on through at least the first half of this year and the emergence of more infectious COVID-19 variants, China's central bank has started cutting interest rates and pumping more cash into the financial system to lower borrowing costs. Further modest easing steps are expected in coming weeks.

Stability will trump everything ahead of a once-in-five-years Communist Party congress this year, with policymakers looking to ward off a sharper slowdown that could undermine job creation.

### RISKS OF EASING, COVID CURBS

But such easing carries risks, as other global central banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve are preparing to raise interest rates, which could spur potentially destabilising capital outflows from emerging markets like China.

The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday cut its China 2022 growth forecast to 4.8%, from 5.6% previously, reflecting the property woes and the hit to consumption from strict COVID-19 curbs.

"Industrial activity slowed due to weak domestic demand," said Zhang Zhiwei, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "The service sector is also affected adversely by the outbreaks in many cities."

"The weak PMI indicates the policy easing measures from the government have not yet been passed to the real economy... We expect the government will step up policy supports in coming months, particularly through more fiscal spending."

A sub-index in the official PMI for production stood at 50.9, down from 51.4 in December, while new orders fell to 49.3 from 49.7.

While China's new COVID-19 cases have been low compared with many other countries, a surge of infections since late December in the manufacturing hub of Xian forced many auto and chip makers to shut operations. Production has gradually returned to normal as the city emerged from a lockdown.

Samsung Electronics Co Ltd (005930.KS) last month temporarily adjusted operations at its Xian manufacturing facilities for NAND flash memory chips, but it said on Wednesday that production has returned to normal.

	<p>Output in Tianjin, which battled an outbreak of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, was also affected.</p> <p>At the same time, the government is trying to limit industrial air pollution levels ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics, starting on Friday. China has told steel mills in northern regions to cut production until mid-March.</p> <p>A survey on China's sprawling services sector also showed growth slowing in January, as virus containment measures hit consumer sentiment.</p> <p>China's official composite PMI, which combined manufacturing and services, stood at 50.1 in January compared with 52.2 in December.</p> <p>China's economy grew 4.0% in the fourth quarter from a year earlier, its weakest expansion in one and a half years.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Taiwan pledges to 'stride' into world</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/china/facing-chinese-pressure-taiwan-president-pledges-stride-into-world-2022-01-30/">https://www.reuters.com/world/china/facing-chinese-pressure-taiwan-president-pledges-stride-into-world-2022-01-30/</a>
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen thanked democratic nations for their support of the island in her Lunar New Year message on Sunday and pledged to "stride out" into the world, sounding a defiant note in the face of unrelenting Chinese pressure.</p> <p>China, which claims the democratically-ruled island as its own territory, has increased military activity around Taiwan over the past two years and stepped up efforts to limit its international role, lambasting those who have sought to support Taipei or strengthen ties with it.</p> <p>In a short pre-recorded video message a day before the eve of Lunar New Year on Monday, the formal start of the most important holiday in the Chinese-speaking world, Tsai expressed appreciation for growing international support for Taiwan.</p> <p>"I want to especially thank all democratic partners for their support to Taiwan over the past year," she said. "We will continue to deepen exchanges with all countries and stride out into the world."</p> <p>Taiwan has been heartened by support not only from the United States, traditionally its most important backer, but also leaders and politicians in Japan, Europe and by the G7 group of industrialised nations, all of which have angered Beijing.</p> <p>Tsai neither directly mentioned China nor directly offered it new year greetings, simply extending best wishes to "good friends" around the world celebrating the festival, which is also observed in countries such as Vietnam and South Korea.</p> <p>Last year Tsai wished China a happy Lunar New Year, but said she would not yield to Chinese pressure and reiterated a call for dialogue to resume with Beijing, which China rejected.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 More Covid cases Olympic personnel</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-34-new-covid-19-cases-among-olympics-related-personnel-2022-01-30/">https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-34-new-covid-19-cases-among-olympics-related-personnel-2022-01-30/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Thirty-four new COVID-19 infections were detected among Olympics-related personnel, the Beijing 2022 Winter Games organising committee said on Sunday, including Poland's short track medal hopeful Natalia Maliszewska.</p>



Of those, 13 were athletes or team officials who tested positive after arriving at the airport on Saturday.

Of the total infections, 23 were among new airport arrivals, while 11 were people already in the "closed loop" bubble that separates event personnel from the public to try to curb the spread of infections.

The loop allows Games participants to move freely between their accommodations and Olympic venues on official transport, but they are not allowed to move freely in the city. All Games stakeholders, including media and staff, are also tested daily.

Maliszewska is the eighth Polish athlete to have tested positive and has gone into isolation, the Polish Olympic Committee said on Sunday. She joins infected fellow speedskaters Natalia Czerwonka, Magdalena Czystochon and Marek Kania in isolation.

With the 500m heats set to start on Saturday, Maliszewska is in a race against time to compete. Athletes who test positive and show no symptoms are to be discharged from isolation only if they provide two consecutive negative tests 24 hours apart.

Australia said on Sunday that one member of its delegation had tested positive for COVID-19 on arrival in Beijing and been placed in isolation.

The person took another test on Sunday, which returned a negative result.

"The team member will now undergo a final test tomorrow, which if again negative, will allow the member to return to their usual routine," the Australian Olympic Committee said in a statement.

Beijing Games organisers have warned of more cases in the coming days as the Chinese capital enforces stringent measures, restricting movement and contact of any Games participant with the local population.

In contrast to many countries seeking to live with COVID-19, China has isolated itself with a zero-tolerance policy, cancelling nearly all international flights. Olympic athletes and others must fly directly into the city on charter flights.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Social Security expands public services</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/01/29/social-security-pandemic/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/01/29/social-security-pandemic/</a>
GIST	<p>The Social Security Administration is expanding a vital pandemic service to taxpayers that it had restricted to just one hour a day, allowing drop boxes at its closed field offices to accept sensitive documents and forms for more hours as it eases toward opening some facilities.</p> <p>The agency is putting the workaround in place while its network of 1,230 local offices remain closed until at least mid-April, apart from a smattering of in-person appointments. Most Social Security employees have been working from home since March 2020, but officials say they are trying to improve assistance to low-income elderly and disabled people who rely on their local Social Security office to navigate one of the government's most complex systems of subsistence benefits.</p> <p>The agency announced last week that it reached agreement with its major unions to begin a return to the office this spring. Bargaining over the timing of the move was contentious for months, officials on both sides acknowledge. The deal followed criticism from advocates for the disabled and members of Congress about Social Security largely closing its doors while most government offices opened months ago or never closed to the public during the pandemic.</p> <p>Field offices are expected to reopen for appointments and walk-in visits that are crucial for disabled and elderly claimants who have trouble negotiating the Internet and the phone. Many details are unresolved, including how many days the field staff will continue to work from home. Administrative law judges who</p>

hear appeals of denied claims for disability benefits — and are now conducting hearings on the phone or through videoconferencing — will resume in-person work in May and June, the agency said.

The Washington Post [reported in December](#) that Social Security had dramatically curtailed its public services during the coronavirus pandemic. Absent open offices, the agency was depending on the public leaving birth certificates, divorce records, green cards and other primary documents required for them to verify their identity in drop boxes that were open as little as one hour a day. Forty percent of field offices provided no boxes at all. (The agency originally told The Post the number was 20 percent).

“We are in the process of expanding both the number of offices with drop boxes and the hours those drop boxes are available to align with the local office’s hours (normally 9 am to 4 pm),” Mark Hinkle, a Social Security spokesman, said in an email.

The drop-box system still leaves room for error. Documents and forms must now be scanned by managers into computer systems that in some cases still run on computer language that debuted half a century ago, then assigned to claims processors working from home. Original documents must be returned to claimants. Advocates say that loop is not always closed quickly or at all.

For months, congressional Republicans had pressured Social Security to improve service and return its staff to providing it in person. Concern expanded this week to include Senate Democrats, who demanded answers from acting Commissioner Kilolo Kijakazi to how the agency plans to “provide timely and quality service to the public” during the pandemic.

“An incorrect denial of benefits or inaccurate payment can be the difference between a beneficiary having a home or being evicted, or whether or not they can afford their prescription drugs,” Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Special Committee on Aging Chairman Robert P. Casey Jr. (D-Pa.), joined by another 15 senators, [wrote in a five-page letter to Kijakazi](#). The letter cited The Post’s reporting on the agency’s struggles to serve disabled and low-income elderly taxpayers with its field offices closed.

The senators noted that a workaround offering in-person appointments to those with what Social Security terms “dire needs” is leaving out at-risk groups, cited a “large and growing backlog” of cases pending at state agencies that conduct medical reviews for Social Security and asked Kijakazi what she is doing to address a substantial, pandemic-related decline in applications for disability benefits.

Hinkle declined to comment on the letters from members of Congress, saying that Kijakazi “responds directly” to them.

The Post report focused in part on Mariann Clouse, a 21-year-old in Nashville with a terminal and degenerative neurological disease known as Juvenile Huntington’s, whose lawyer filed a claim last May for a rare compassionate allowance that would give her a monthly disability benefit. As a result of the report, Clouse was seen last week by a Tennessee physician who does medical exams for Social Security, her lawyer said.

“It takes a while from there,” Ann-Douglas Tycker, who represents Clouse, said. “No one is in a hurry but Mariann.”

The Post also highlighted the efforts of Beth Bates, a legal services attorney in Jackson, Tenn., to appeal for disability benefits for a client with degenerative disk disease, breathing problems and borderline intellectual function who had twice been turned down. The woman’s appeal had stalled for more than a year while the state searched for a psychiatrist to conduct a required exam. Following The Post’s report, an administrative law judge notified Bates that her appeal was successful.

Bates said her client will receive back pay to 2017. Her first disability check is expected in February. The pending addition of drop-box hours and locations is an improvement of a workaround that itself began deep into the pandemic, advocates say.

SSA spokesman Hinkle said other efforts also are underway to improve access in the field. The staff has almost tripled the number of 15-minute in-office appointments it provides for “dire need” circumstances. The agency said it continues to modify procedures to eliminate red tape, by allowing applicants to use some secondary evidence and more online forms, and to attest in lieu of signatures in some cases.

But advocates continue to point to serious problems created by the field office closures, particularly the plummeting number of people eligible for aid but not applying because the system is now too complicated.

Despite the nosediving number of claims, the state agencies that handle medical exams for Social Security are on track to end January with 1 million pending applications, according to an analysis of federal data by Stacy Cloyd of the National Organization of Social Security Claimants’ Representatives. That is a 27 percent increase from the same time two years ago.

Attrition, the shift to remote work and a shortage of physicians willing to see claimants in person are causing the delays, advocates said.

The advocates have a meeting scheduled with agency officials Jan. 31 to discuss a range of proposals they have made to halt punitive policies affecting disabled and elderly beneficiaries until person-to-person service fully resumes.

Their most significant request is to resume the suspension of a process called continuing disability reviews.

The agency has the right to determine if someone’s medical condition has improved, then potentially reduce benefits. These reviews became controversial during the Trump administration, when then-commissioner Andrew Saul proposed making them more frequent, suggesting fewer benefits were needed. But Saul agreed to suspend the reviews at the start of the public health crisis, then resumed them after six months. Biden reversed Saul’s plan to require more frequent reviews, but Social Security is still conducting them.

“If they’re going to serve the public with the field offices closed, it should be in a helpful way to keep the focus on things that help people maintain benefits,” said Michelle Spadafore, who directs the Disability Advocacy Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group. “They should put the things that suspend benefits on the back burner.”

Her organization joined other advocates in October in a class-action lawsuit against Social Security on behalf of five disability recipients that claims the closed field offices prevented them from reporting any financial changes. When the agency sent notices to thousands of people telling them their benefits were going to be reduced because they were being overpaid, the plaintiffs claim, they did not have a meaningful chance to contest the change.

Before shutting in March 2020, Social Security field offices served 43 million people a year.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Families resume, hospitals overwhelmed
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/28/texas-omicron-pandemic/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/28/texas-omicron-pandemic/</a>
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — The El Campo Impact 13-and-under girls volleyball team was down by one point in their opening tournament of the year. It was Kamryn Thompson’s turn to serve, and it was a winner. Cheers and screams rose from the packed crowd of hundreds of maskless coaches, parents and siblings in a mid-January gathering that felt as if the coronavirus had never hit.</p> <p>About 15 miles away, Gabriela Hernandez was trapped behind a glass partition in a pediatric intensive care unit jammed with severely ill children battling covid-19. Her daughter, Kimberly, who is immunocompromised, had tested positive for the virus, and now her body was going haywire. Hernandez</p>

and the hospital's medical teams were frustrated about the choices that have helped propel the virus' spread and put vulnerable people like Kimberly at risk.

The split-screen reality of American life amid a pandemic has never been as stark as at this moment, in the 23rd month of a crisis that people had expected would long be over.

"I know people who have died because of this and people don't believe it," Hernandez said. "You have to believe it. You have to know that this is happening."

The point at which a pandemic ends is not a discrete event marked by a celebration in the streets, like at the conclusion of a war. It's more of a gradual process in which humans who have developed some immunity learn to live alongside a virus that has become less lethal. Some argue that time has come, citing evidence that the omicron variant is causing less severe disease than the delta variant in many people. Other people point to overwhelmed hospitals and a climbing death toll to implore people to continue taking precautions to get through this surge and then reassess.

Those dueling perspectives are playing out as the United States set a record for new coronavirus infections this month, surpassing 800,000 a day for the first time, according to The Post's seven-day tracking average. The number has fallen to just below 550,000 as of Friday. Hospitalizations have plateaued, but deaths are rising — surpassing more than 2,300 a day on average. The last time the numbers were so high was in February 2021 when the country was emerging from the worst of last winter's wave.

Both sides blame the other for elongating the pandemic, but the debate is in some ways less polarized than in the past.

Six former health advisers to President Biden have argued that it is time the country stopped being in a "perpetual state of emergency" and adopt a "new normal" strategy of living with the coronavirus that would curb its worst effects but not seek to eradicate it. Even Democratic governors who ordered strict closures in earlier waves are not doing so now, citing tools such as vaccines and treatments; businesses and schools remain open in most places nationwide. After nearly two years of restrictions, even the most compliant Americans, who got their shots, meticulously wore masks and avoided crowded places, express exhaustion.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll released Friday found that big majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans said they feel "tired" and "frustrated" about the state of the pandemic. People were more worried about omicron's impact on the economy and local hospitals than its impact on their personal lives, the poll found.

Fear is giving way to inevitability, among those who feel protected from the virus' worst effects because they are vaccinated as well as those who believe covid's risks are exaggerated. Empathy toward the vulnerable is giving way to worries about jobs and the strain on family and friends.

#### **'Is it worth it?'**

Finishing a snack from the concession stand at the volleyball tournament, Misty Dehoyos, 43, said enough is enough. She's vaccinated and wore a mask for more than a year. She and her husband, Felipe, were infected with the coronavirus shortly before Christmas, and their symptoms were pretty much like those of a cold. The couple decided they wouldn't isolate from their unvaccinated children, ages 11, 16 and 19. Even if the children got the virus, the couple figured the illnesses would likely be mild, and as a bonus, might help protect them against a more severe variant in the future. The kids never felt sick or tested positive.

"It's time," Dehoyos said. "We have to adapt. There's no way to eradicate it."

Dehoyos said she's happy that most things in Texas are fully open. At the volleyball tournament last year, everyone had to wear masks, spectators were limited and the ball had to be wiped with disinfectant before

every serve. Now those restrictions are gone with only one remaining: The teams don't switch courts after each set.

But Dehoyos said she's frustrated that the rest of the country hasn't followed suit. A friend had a trip planned to San Francisco, she said, but may cancel after learning California has an indoor mask mandate, and that San Francisco, along with nearby Oakland, Berkeley and Contra Costa County, require proof of vaccination at restaurants — none of which sounded very fun for a vacation getaway, she said.

From the pandemic's earliest days, Texas — like some other Republican-controlled states — has been looser with coronavirus restrictions than those on the East and West coasts. Gov. Greg Abbott (R) has banned mask and vaccine mandates as an infringement on personal rights — measures criticized by the Biden administration and being fought in court by cities and school districts as necessary for public safety.

Despite Abbott's at-times-combative tone against U.S. public health officials, a number of parents here who decline to wear masks, or get themselves or their children vaccinated, insisted their decisions had little to do with politics.

Deep in the back of the gym, on the sidelines of Court No. 6, Brooke Smith, 30, said it came down to a lack of trust in government leaders — on both sides of the aisle.

For the past two years, she said, she believes that information given to the public has been twisted to fit a political or public health goal. At the beginning of the pandemic, top Trump administration officials including Centers for Disease Control and Prevention then-Director Robert Redfield and Anthony S. Fauci discouraged people from wearing masks — a posture they acknowledged later was partly because of concerns about the inadequate supply for health workers. Later, under President Biden, public health officials repeatedly touted the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine as equal to other two-shot vaccines that were made using a different technology. Studies have since shown the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines offer more protection.

In both these cases, Smith acknowledged, scientific knowledge had evolved. But she said the situation does not inspire her confidence in the vaccines. "They developed it too fast," Smith said. "I feel like they keep talking about new issues." Hundreds of millions of Americans have received the shots under the most rigorous monitoring in U.S. history, and serious safety problems have been extremely rare.

She said that neither she nor her five children, who range in age from 2 to 13, are vaccinated. The family got covid in early January but had mild cases, and everyone recovered quickly.

While Smith said she worries about immunocompromised neighbors and friends, she also worries about those who have lost jobs as a result of the economic turmoil stemming from pandemic restrictions and uncertainties. "They took it too far in my opinion," she said.

Tanya Burrow, 46, an El Campo team mom with four children, was unfazed by the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd. Schools opened in her area without masks, so her daughter Abby is used to it. No one in the family is vaccinated, and they don't regularly use masks. She gave Abby, 13, a choice as to whether to wear one while she is playing, and the girl said no.

"I get to play volleyball, and we don't have to wear masks like last year," Abby chimed in. "That was treacherous."

Kamryn's mom, Keshia Hardway, an administrative assistant for a home health company, is one of only a few parents interviewed who said they are vaccinated. She said it was required for her job, but she has no plans to vaccinate her two oldest children, Kamryn, 12, and an 11-year-old son. She's still trying to decide about her 7-year-old daughter, who has allergies and may be at greater risk for complications.

She's also worried about long-term effects since the vaccines have not been around very long. The most concerning issue reported has been the exceedingly rare cases of myocarditis, a kind of heart

inflammation. The CDC has said the cases were mostly mild and largely affected male teenagers and young men. In the case of her two girls, Hardway worries more about fertility. She knows the information circulated early on about vaccines affecting fertility was false, and that millions of vaccinated women have gotten pregnant and given birth. A study this month funded by the National Institutes for Health showed no evidence that vaccines make it harder to conceive.

Yet Hardway remains hesitant. “I feel like we’re all going to get it,” she says of coronavirus infections. “It doesn’t matter what precautions we take. ... People are weighing freedom versus what’s probably going to be mild symptoms. Is it worth it?”

### **‘A prison’**

The 2.1 square miles around Texas Children’s Hospital, known as a “super neighborhood” with 60 hospitals, medical schools and related businesses, feels like a different world from that of the nearby volleyball tournament. The streets here are filled with masked people trying to keep socially distant as they rush to and from appointments, surgeries and labs that are at the center of the fight against the coronavirus.

After more than 30 years in medicine, Lara Shekerdemian, chief of critical care at Texas Children’s, is no stranger to tragedy. But what has frustrated her lately is to “see a child suffering that would not need intensive care, had the clock been turned back” and the child been vaccinated. Earlier this month, the number of children with covid being cared for at the hospital hit a record of more than 85 in one day. The previous high during the delta wave in the summer was 65.

“We didn’t think this is what 2022 was going to be like for us. We thought it was going to be a new day, a new year. ... And, of course, it’s not very different,” Shekerdemian said. “We’re kind of disheartened.”

Nicole Leathers, an intensive care nurse, said that during the pandemic’s early days, they had a lot of staff and few pediatric patients. Now they are inundated with sick children and are short-staffed as a result of burnout and colleagues leaving the industry or out sick with covid. She said it has been jolting to see so many young children, especially those younger than 5 who are not yet eligible for vaccines, coming in to the hospital lately.

She described her anguish after she and her team performed CPR on a child with covid. The doctors and nurses were in full protective gear, which made it hot and difficult to see and hear. On top of worrying about the child, her heart was breaking for the family member next to them who was terrified but unable to leave the room because of infection precautions. They got the child stabilized, but she remembers “walking out of that and wringing my shirt out as sweat dripped out, physically exhausted, emotionally exhausted, and thinking, ‘This would have been hard without a pandemic. It’s just now 10 times harder.’”

“We’re just really kind of getting to this point of max exhaustion and grief and, you know, pulling up our boot straps to see how can we just keep going,” she said.

Chris Crouch, 38, has been on both sides of the pandemic’s split reality. Until his pregnant wife found herself in intensive care battling covid, he had been adamantly anti-vaccine and only wore a mask when required. Now, after nearly losing her, he is angry about people who not only refuse to wear masks themselves but also mock others for doing so.

“We don’t know their reason on why they’re socially distancing or why they’re wearing a mask. So don’t judge them,” he said. “Just accept it and just respect it, because you don’t know what they’ve gone through or what their family members are going through.”

Kimberly Garcia Hernandez, 13, and her family have also suffered from the world opening up around them.

The seventh-grader is vaccinated but has an autoimmune condition that means the shots probably don’t spur her body to develop a full immune response — if any at all. She had come to the hospital Jan. 4 with diarrhea and tested positive for the coronavirus, and her condition spiraled downward from there. She had

a colon infection. Her kidneys started to fail, so she was put on dialysis. Then she developed life-threatening clots. Doctors said it was difficult to tell what was caused by covid and what was caused by her immune condition, but the combination was terrifying.

Ten days after she came to the hospital, Kimberly was conscious and her condition more stable, but she remained in intensive care because her blood pressure was sky-high. Besides her severe illness, her mother said Kimberly has become hopeless and depressed in the hospital, although she had always been a “happy, cheerful girl,” singing and dancing and joking that her favorite subject in school is “boys.”

“There are days when she doesn’t want anything anymore, she doesn’t talk to anyone, she doesn’t say anything,” Gabriela Hernandez said.

The worst part, her mother said, is that both of them are in strict isolation, unable to leave the hospital room at all because of the risk of spreading the virus, despite having done everything right — masking, using antibacterial gel and being fully vaccinated. Gabriela is presumed to have the coronavirus because of her close contact with her daughter. It feels like “a prison,” she said.

Her family had taken the virus seriously, she said, but it wasn’t until her daughter was hospitalized that she came to understand the far-reaching complications of covid-19: “I didn’t really know the ravages it caused. ... I thought it was just a flu.”

The isolation, on top of her daughter’s frightening condition, has been at times unbearable.

“That is a very ugly thing people should know, that it causes fear when you already have it ...” she said. Everyone who comes into the room, from the doctors and nurses to the cleaning staff, “becomes an astronaut” with full protective gear.

“I see them and I say, ‘Wow, can I be so scary for having covid?’ ”

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HEADLINE	01/29 In omicron wake, single parents struggle
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/parenting/2022/01/29/single-parents-omicron/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/parenting/2022/01/29/single-parents-omicron/</a>
GIST	<p>Andria Hayes-Birchler had barely begun to comprehend her new reality as a single parent before the pandemic hit. In March 2020, she had an 8-month-old infant and a 4-year-old, and her soon-to-be-ex-husband had recently moved from their home in Washington, D.C., to California. What followed was a year and a half of unrelenting crisis as she struggled to balance her career as a research consultant with caring for her two young sons, alone.</p> <p>So, in September, when her now-6-year-old son finally returned full-time to a first-grade classroom and her 2-year-old was thriving at day care, and Hayes-Birchler found herself inundated with new clients, it felt as if maybe they had crossed a finish line. “Like now we were going to be okay,” she says, “and now I was able to actually establish my baseline as a single parent.”</p> <p>Then came omicron. In December, her older son’s school abruptly returned to virtual learning. Her younger son was already home — he’d come down with an ear infection, which required antibiotics, which he did not tolerate well, which meant he couldn’t attend day care for 10 days. Then his older brother tested positive for the coronavirus, and the whole family had to begin a lengthy quarantine, and their holiday travel plans to visit family were canceled. (And of course, in the midst of all this, their refrigerator broke.) For 33 days in December and January, Hayes-Birchler found herself home alone with her boys, and unable to work. Again.</p> <p>“But this time there was no unemployment benefits, no stimulus check, no child tax credit,” she says. “I felt very much like I was in the middle of a PTSD episode.”</p>



About 3 in 10 families with children are headed by single parents, [according to the U.S. Census](#), and 75 percent of those parents are mothers. Single-parent families comprise more than [10 million households](#) in America — yet those who spoke to The Washington Post said they often feel like outliers, especially during the pandemic, and especially during *this* stage of the pandemic, as they cope with years of cumulative stress as well as the fresh chaos unleashed by the omicron variant. Many parents say they’ve felt painfully overlooked: by school systems who expect them to be able to accommodate virtual learning; by employers who aren’t flexible when a day-care closure upends a workweek; by lawmakers who have withdrawn financial safety nets; and by health guidelines that are often impossible for a solo-parent household to follow.

There has been plenty of public acknowledgment of the cumulative, crushing toll these past years have taken on parents. Hayes-Birchler has read many news stories about the trials of parenting in the pandemic, she says, “and almost always there is one line somewhere that says, ‘and *this* is what it’s like for dual-parent households — for single parent households, it’s even worse!’ but then it rarely delves into what ‘even worse’ looks like.”

For Lauren Smith, a single mom in D.C., ‘even worse’ looked like a particular afternoon in May 2020 when she was attending a work meeting on Zoom while caring for her then-11-month-old twin boys. One of them had a diaper blowout during the meeting, and while Smith was in the middle of changing him, her other son dropped her laptop on his foot and started screaming. She was expected to deliver a presentation to her co-workers within minutes, she recalls, but instead she closed her laptop, lay down on the living room floor with her two babies, and sobbed along with them.

“I think I cried more over the whole first year of the pandemic than I had my entire life,” she says, “and almost always because I had to choose between my kids and work.”

The memory alone evokes a surge of visceral anxiety, she says, which is why it felt like a particularly destabilizing gut-punch when her sons’ day-care facility announced in early January that it would be closed for a week because several teachers and staff had developed covid-19 over the holiday break. Once again, she found herself trying to figure out how she would make an impossible situation somehow possible.

“That was a really, really rough way to start a new year,” Smith says. “I don’t know if I’m numb, but I just — I live in terror. It was just another sign that this year might not be anything different, that this situation is just ongoing.”

If you ask single parents how they’re doing lately, one answer is: They don’t even have time to tell you. They’d love to, but they simply have no spare minutes to schedule a call, between the relentless demands of caring for their kids, doing their jobs and keeping a household running.

Another answer: They’re weary of being told how incredible it is that they haven’t completely fallen apart yet, here on the cusp of the pandemic’s third year, in the wake of another miserable surge.

“I get a lot of: ‘Oh, Rachel, I don’t know how you do it,’” says Rachel Perrone, a single mom to a 14-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter in Northwest D.C. “My answer is, ‘what else am I going to do? You would do it, too.’”

“So many people say ‘How have you managed?’” says Hayes-Birchler. “And my answer is always, ‘I have no choice.’”

“As a single parent, we have this mind-set to just ‘figure it out,’ and this pandemic exposes that we don’t have as much control as we think we do,” says Tal’Meisha Frontis, a mental health counselor in North Carolina with an 11-year-old son. “You always have another thing coming, you can’t catch your breath. If I had to sum up this whole entire thing — it’s just drowning.”

When Frontis and her son both tested positive for the coronavirus in December, she says, it was almost a relief that they didn't have to try to isolate from one another. The CDC recommends that covid-infected family members stay away from all other members of a household — “but those guidelines, they're irrelevant to us,” Frontis says. “We always knew, if either of us tests positive, we're here together.”

(Asked how single parents are expected to navigate a situation where only one family member has tested positive, a spokesperson for the CDC reiterated the existing guidelines: “CDC acknowledges it can be challenging to isolate within a household. However, it is important for people with COVID-19 to remain apart from other people, if possible, even if they are living together.”)

Allison Plagens, a single mom to a 12-year-old in Michigan, says she's come to accept that these protocols are not meant for households like hers. “I've just thought, ‘well, I'm just going to ignore that — that's not going to work for my family,’” she says. “I don't think anyone has taken into account what a single parent has to go through.”

Plagens says she's felt this way many times during the pandemic, including when she joined a support group for fellow parents of students in Ann Arbor, Mich. The public school system hosted the sessions virtually, led by school counselors and social workers. “But most of the other parents were pretty well-off, and they weren't single parents,” Plagens says. She listened as other participants asked what to do about their child's Zoom fatigue, or whether it might be worthwhile to switch school districts; some noted that they'd found it helpful to take paid time off to focus on their children.

Plagens, meanwhile, had no choice but to leave her administrative job because her child, who identifies as gender-nonbinary and struggles with depression and anxiety, could not be safely left at home alone. Suddenly unemployed, Plagens cut back dramatically on their spending, collected free lunches handed out by the school and relied on the now-expired child tax credit disbursements to help keep her family afloat.

She didn't see her reality represented in the support group, she says: “No one was talking about kids with major mental health issues. No one was like: ‘I'm a single parent struggling, how do I handle this?’ And every time I asked that, they'd be like, ‘go to therapy —?’” She laughs wryly. “Okay. Thanks for the suggestion.”

Even the most basic tasks can be daunting for parents with no backup support. Jason Warner, a single father in Los Angeles who adopted his 10-year-old son four years ago, says he's been frequently scolded for bringing his child along when he goes to pick up a prescription, or visit a doctor's office, or even shop for groceries.

“I have a lot of other single parent friends who have experienced this, too,” Warner says. “At one point I had to get an MRI, and they were horrified that I brought him. He came when I went to the orthopedic surgeon a couple of weeks ago for a follow-up appointment. But what am I supposed to do? I can't leave him at home, and school was not in session.”

And alternative arrangements are expensive, says Jessica Dillman, a single mom in D.C. who has her groceries delivered because her toddler daughter is not yet old enough to wear a mask. “My groceries cost 20 to 25 percent more than what they would if I felt safe enough to take her into a grocery store with me,” she says. Anytime Dillman leaves the house without her daughter, she says, she pays a babysitter \$20 per hour — the going rate in her area — to stay with her child.

Such outings are rare; Dillman works from home for a public relations firm, and she has postponed enrolling her daughter in day care while the omicron variant is still rampant. So for now, Dillman's days remain a blur of nonstop multitasking.

“The chores, the work, keeping a home running entirely on my own, trying not to let anyone else down. I'm tired. I'm anxious. It's winter. Everything is harder in the winter,” she says. “It honestly just never ends.”

	<p>The longer it all goes on, the harder it is to believe it will actually end. So Tal’Meisha Frontis says she focuses on reasons to feel thankful — that her son is back at school, that she’s back at work, that she’s earning money again, for now. “I’m grateful, but I’m not feeling yet like it’s over,” she says. “It’s hard to let myself experience hope.”</p> <p>Rachel Perrone is pragmatic; panic, she says, isn’t a luxury she can afford. She and her 12-year-old daughter recently finished quarantine after testing positive in early January. Her 14-year-old son is still working to catch up academically after struggling through virtual schooling last year. “We’ll just take it as it comes,” Perrone says, equally resolved and resigned. “I’m exhausted in my bones, but I try not to spend too much time in that kind of head space, because it doesn’t help. Spiraling isn’t going to get supper on the table.”</p> <p>For Hayes-Birchler, her recent experience quarantining with her sons has made her painfully aware of just how fragile our collective recovery is, how wobbly the return to an orderly existence. It has also made her appreciate the privileges she does not take for granted: her flexible work clients, her solid savings account, an excellent therapist. Lately, she says, her therapy sessions have addressed the fact that, as a single parent facing a barrage of demands and crises, it is difficult to even find time to process it all, or to imagine what a ‘normal’ future might look like.</p> <p>“People are constantly asking me, ‘do you have any New Year’s resolutions?’” she says. “And I’m like, ‘yeah: to keep surviving.’”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 China Covid controls to outlast the virus?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/world/asia/covid-restrictions-china-lockdown.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/world/asia/covid-restrictions-china-lockdown.html</a>
GIST	<p>The police had warned Xie Yang, a human rights lawyer, not to go to Shanghai to visit the mother of a dissident. He went to the airport anyway.</p> <p>His phone’s health code app — a digital pass indicating possible exposure to the coronavirus — was green, which meant he could travel. His home city, Changsha, had no Covid-19 cases, and he had not left in weeks.</p> <p>Then his app turned red, flagging him as high risk. Airport security tried to put him in quarantine, but he resisted. Mr. Xie <a href="#">accused the authorities</a> of meddling with his health code to bar him from traveling.</p> <p>“The Chinese Communist Party has found the best model for controlling people,” he said in a telephone interview in December. This month, the police detained Mr. Xie, a government critic, accusing him of inciting subversion and provoking trouble.</p> <p>The pandemic has given Xi Jinping, China’s top leader, a powerful case for deepening the Communist Party’s reach into the lives of 1.4 billion citizens, filling out his vision of the country as a <a href="#">model of secure order</a>, in contrast to the “<a href="#">chaos of the West</a>.” In the two years since officials isolated the city of Wuhan in the <a href="#">first lockdown</a> of the pandemic, the Chinese government has honed its powers to track and corral people, backed by upgraded technology, armies of neighborhood workers and broad public support.</p> <p>Emboldened by their successes in stamping out Covid, Chinese officials are turning their sharpened surveillance against other risks, including crime, pollution and “hostile” political forces. This amounts to a potent techno-authoritarian tool for Mr. Xi as he intensifies his campaigns against corruption and dissent.</p> <p>The foundation of the controls is the health code. The local authorities, working with tech companies, generate a user’s profile based on location, travel history, test results and other health data. The code’s color — green, yellow or red — determines whether the holder is allowed into buildings or public spaces. Its use is enforced by legions of local officials with the power to quarantine residents or restrict their movements.</p>

These controls are key to China's goal of stamping out the virus entirely within its borders — a strategy on which the party has staked its credibility despite the emergence of highly contagious variants. After China's initial missteps in letting the coronavirus spread, its "[zero Covid](#)" approach has helped keep infections low, while the death toll continues to grow in the United States and elsewhere. But Chinese officials have at times been severe, [isolating young children](#) from their parents or jailing people deemed to have [broken containment rules](#).

City officials did not respond to questions about assertions by Mr. Xie, the lawyer. While it is hard to know what goes on in individual cases, the government itself has signaled it wants to use these technologies in other ways.

Officials have used pandemic health monitoring systems to [flush out fugitives](#). Some fugitives have been tracked down by their health codes. Others who avoided the apps have found life so difficult that they have surrendered.

For all of its outward sophistication, though, China's surveillance system remains labor intensive. And while the public has generally supported Beijing's intrusions during the pandemic, privacy concerns are growing.

"China's pandemic controls have really produced great results, because they can monitor down to every individual," said Mei Haoyu, 24, an employee at a dental hospital in Hangzhou, a city in eastern China, who worked as a volunteer early in the pandemic.

"But if after the pandemic ends these means are still there for the government," he added, "that's a big risk for ordinary people."

#### **'A vicious cycle arises'**

A Covid cluster that rippled across Zhejiang Province in east China late last year began with a funeral. When one attendee, a health worker, tested positive in a routine test, 100 tracers sprang into action.

Within hours, officials alerted the authorities in Hangzhou, 45 miles away, that a potential carrier of the coronavirus was at large there: a man who had driven to the funeral days earlier. Government workers found and tested him — also positive.

Using digital health code records, teams of tracers plotted out a network of people to test based on where the man had been: a restaurant, a mahjong parlor, card-playing rooms. Within a couple of weeks, they stopped the chain of infections in Hangzhou — in all, 29 people there were found to be infected.

China's capacity to trace outbreaks like this has relied heavily on the health code. Residents sign up for the system by submitting their personal information in one of a range of apps. The health code is essentially required, because without it, people cannot enter buildings, restaurants or even parks. Before the pandemic, China already had a vast ability to track people using location data from cellphones; now, that monitoring is far more expansive.

In recent months, the authorities in various cities have [expanded their definition](#) of close contact to include people whose cellphone signals were recorded within as much as half a mile of an infected person.

The party's experiment in using data to control the flow of people has helped keep Covid at bay. Now these same tools potentially give officials greater power to manage other challenges.

Mr. Xi has praised Hangzhou's "City Brain" center — which pulls together data on traffic, economic activity, hospital use and public complaints — [as a model](#) for how China can use technology to address social problems.

Since 2020, Hangzhou has also used video cameras on streets to [check whether residents](#) are wearing masks. One district [monitored home power consumption](#) to check whether residents were sticking to

quarantine orders. The central city of Luoyang [installed sensors](#) on the doors of residents quarantining at home, in order to notify officials if they were opened.

With so much invested, financially and politically, in technological solutions, failures can have big repercussions.

During the recent lockdown in Xi'an, a city of 13 million in northwest China, the health code system [crashed twice](#) in two weeks, disrupting the lives of residents who had to update their apps each day with proof that they had taken Covid tests.

By focusing on technology and surveillance, Chinese officials may be neglecting other ways of protecting lives, such as expanding participation in public health programs, wrote Chen Yun, a scholar at Fudan University in Shanghai, in a recent assessment of China's response to Covid.

The risk, Ms. Chen wrote, is that "a vicious cycle arises: People become increasingly marginalized, while technology and power increasingly penetrate everywhere."

### **'On call at all times'**

For over a decade, the Communist Party has been shoring up its armies of grass-roots officials who carry out door-to-door surveillance. The party's new digital apparatus has supercharged this older form of control.

China has mobilized 4.5 million so-called grid workers to fight the outbreak, according to [state media](#) — roughly one in every 250 adults. Under the grid management system, cities, villages and towns are divided into sections, sometimes of just a few blocks, which are then assigned to individual workers.

During normal times, their duties included pulling weeds, mediating disputes and keeping an eye on potential troublemakers.

Amid the pandemic, those duties mushroomed.

Workers were given the task of guarding residential complexes and recording the identities of all who entered. They called residents to make sure they had been tested and vaccinated, and helped those in lockdown [take out their trash](#).

They also were given powerful new tools.

The central government has directed the police, as well as internet and telephone companies, to [share information about residents' travel history](#) with community workers so that the workers can [decide](#) whether residents are considered high-risk.

In a county in southwestern Sichuan Province, the ranks of grid workers tripled to more than 300 over the course of the pandemic, said Pan Xiyu, 26, one of the new hires. Ms. Pan, who is responsible for about 2,000 residents, says she spends much of her time distributing leaflets and setting up loudspeakers to explain new measures and encourage vaccination.

The work can be exhausting. "I have to be on call at all times," Ms. Pan said.

And the pressure to stifle outbreaks can make officials overzealous, prioritizing adherence to the rules no matter the cost.

During the lockdown of Xi'an, hospital workers refused medical care to [a woman who was eight months pregnant](#) because her Covid test result had expired hours earlier. She lost the baby, an episode that inspired widespread public fury. But some blamed the heavy burden placed upon low-level workers to stamp out infections.

“In their view, it’s always preferable to go too far than be too soft-handed, but that’s the pressure created by the environment nowadays,” Li Naitang, a retired worker in Xi’an, said of local officials.

Still, for defenders of China’s stringent measures, the results are undeniable. The country has recorded only 3.3 coronavirus deaths per million residents, compared to about 2,600 per million in the United States. In mid-January, Xi’an officials announced zero new infections; this past week, the lockdown was [lifted entirely](#).

### **‘You’ll never be lost’**

The government’s success in limiting infections means its strategy has earned something that has proved elusive in many other countries: widespread support.

Ms. Pan, the grid worker, said her job was easier now than at the start of the pandemic. Then, residents often argued when told to scan their health codes or wear masks. Now, she said, people have come to accept the health measures.

“Everybody takes them more and more seriously, and is very cooperative,” she said.

Indeed, many Chinese fear that loosening controls could leave room for a resurgence of Covid, said Shen Maohua, a blogger in Shanghai who has written about the pandemic and privacy concerns under his pen name, Wei Zhou.

“For many people, I think, it’s actually a kind of mental trade-off,” he said in an interview. “They’re giving up some rights in return for absolute security.”

The question is how long people will continue to find that exchange worthwhile. Already, social media users have complained about the apparent arbitrariness with which they can find themselves blocked from traveling because of software glitches or policies that vary by city.

Even officials have acknowledged the problems. A state-run news outlet this month [published](#) an analysis of each province’s criteria for a health code to turn from green to yellow. It concluded that, for most provinces, the answer was unclear.

“You never know if your planned itinerary will be canceled, or if your travel plans can be realized,” the article said.

Some government critics warn that the costs will go far beyond inconvenience.

Wang Yu, a well-known human rights lawyer, says she believes the authorities have weaponized the health code to try to stop her from working. In November, as she was returning to Beijing after a work trip, she tried to log her travel on her health code app, as required. But when she selected Jiangsu Province, the drop-down menu listed only one city, Changzhou, where she had not been and which had just recorded several infections. If she chose that, she would most likely be refused entry to Beijing.

In the past, security officers had to physically follow her to interfere with her work. Now, she worries, they can restrict her movements from afar.

“Wherever you go, you’ll never be lost,” said Ms. Wang, who stayed with relatives in Tianjin until her app abruptly returned to normal a month later.

Less high-profile critics are vulnerable, too. Several local governments have pledged to keep a close eye on petitioners — people who travel to Beijing or other cities to lodge complaints about officials — because of their supposed potential to violate travel restrictions.

The health code “can also easily be used as a dirty trick for stability maintenance,” said Lin Yingqiang, a longtime petitioner from Fuzhou, in southeastern China. He said that he was taken off a train by the police



ahead of a party leaders' meeting in November. His health code app turned yellow, requiring that he return to Fuzhou for quarantine, though he had not been anywhere near a confirmed case.

Officials have openly promoted using virus control measures in ways unlinked to the pandemic. In the Guangxi region of southern China, a judge noticed that the grid workers' accounting of local residents was "more thorough than the census." That gave him an idea.

"Why not use this opportunity to have epidemic grid workers find people we couldn't find before, or send summonses to places that were hard to reach before?" he said, according to a [local news report](#). Eighteen summonses were successfully delivered as a result.

Local governments across China have [sought to assure people](#) that their health code data will not be abused. The central government has also [issued regulations](#) promising data privacy. But many Chinese people assume that the authorities can acquire whatever information they want, no matter the rules.

Zan Aizong, a former journalist in Hangzhou, says the expansion of surveillance could make it even easier for the authorities to break up dissenters' activities. He has refused to use the health code, but it means moving around is difficult, and he finds it hard to explain his reasoning to workers at checkpoints.

"I can't tell them the truth — that I'm resisting the health code over surveillance," he said, "because if I mentioned resistance, they'd think that was ridiculous."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 France Macron walks fine line on Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/europe/macron-ukraine-russia-putin-nato-eu.html?">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/europe/macron-ukraine-russia-putin-nato-eu.html?</a>
GIST	<p>PARIS — In 2019, Emmanuel Macron invited President Vladimir V. Putin to the French summer presidential residence at Brégançon, declared the need for the reinvention of "an architecture of security" between the European Union and Russia, and later pronounced that NATO had undergone a "brain death."</p> <p>The French leader enjoys provocation. He detests intellectual laziness. But even by his standards, the apparent dismissal of the Western alliance and tilt toward Moscow were startling. Poland, among other European states with experience of life in the Soviet imperium, expressed alarm.</p> <p>Now a crisis provoked by <a href="#">Russian troops amassed on the Ukrainian border</a> has at once <a href="#">galvanized a supposedly moribund NATO</a> against a Russian threat — the alliance's original mission — and, for Mr. Macron, demonstrated the need for his own intense brand of 21st-century Russian engagement.</p> <p>"Dialogue with Russia is not a gamble, it is an approach that responds to a necessity," a senior official in the presidency, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in keeping with French government practice, said Friday after Mr. Macron and Mr. Putin spoke by phone for more than an hour.</p> <p>Later in the day, Mr. Macron spoke to the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, a move that placed the French leader precisely where he seeks to be ahead of an April presidential election: at the fulcrum of crisis diplomacy on Europe's future.</p> <p>Mr. Macron is walking a fine line. He wants to show that Europe has a core role to play in defusing the crisis, demonstrate his own European leadership to his voters, ensure that Germany and several skeptical European states back his ambitious strategic vision, and avoid giving the United States cause to doubt his commitment to NATO.</p> <p>"He wants to carve out a special role for himself and Europe, in NATO but at its edge," said Nicole Bacharan, a researcher at Sciences Po in Paris. "The case for modernizing the European security arrangements in place since 1991 is compelling. But doing it with <a href="#">130,000 Russian troops at the Ukrainian border</a> is impossible."</p>



Until now, Mr. Macron appears to have held the party line. [Cooperation with the United States](#) has been intense, and welcome. The president, one senior diplomat said, was involved in the drafting of the firm American response to Russian demands that the West cut its military presence in Eastern Europe and guarantee that Ukraine never join NATO — a response judged inadequate in the Kremlin. Mr. Macron has made clear to Mr. Putin that, as a sovereign state, Ukraine has an inalienable right to make its own choices about its strategic direction.

Still, the itch in Mr. Macron to shape from the crisis some realignment of European security that takes greater account of Russian concerns is palpable.

The French official spoke of the necessity for a “new security order in Europe,” provoked in part by the decomposition of the old one.

He suggested that various American decisions had caused a “strategic disorder,” noting that there had been “doubt at a certain moment about the quality of Article 5” — the pivotal part of the NATO treaty that says an attack on any one member state will be “considered an attack against them all.”

This was a clear allusion to former President Donald J. Trump’s dismissive view of NATO, a stance that the Biden administration has taken pains to rectify. For France, however, and to some degree Germany, the lesson has been that, come what may, Europe must stand on its own two feet because its trans-Atlantic partner could go on walkabout again, perhaps as early as 2024.

Mr. Putin and Mr. Macron have one thing in common: They both believe that the post-Cold War security architecture in Europe needs refashioning.

The Russian leader wants to undo the consequences of the Soviet collapse, which he has called “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”; push NATO back out of formerly Soviet-controlled countries to its posture before enlargement; and enshrine the idea of a Russian sphere of influence that limits the independence of a country like Ukraine.

What Mr. Macron wants is less clear, but it includes the development of a strong European defense capacity and a new “stability order” that involves Russia. As the French president said of this innovative arrangement in a speech before the European Parliament this month: “We need to build it between Europeans, then share it with our allies in the NATO framework. And then, we need to propose it to Russia for negotiation.”

The idea of Europe negotiating its strategic posture with Mr. Putin — who has threatened a neighboring country, part of whose territory he has already annexed, without any apparent Western provocation — makes European nations closer than France to the Russian border uneasy.

When Mr. Macron visited Poland in early 2020 — after the scathing comment about NATO and the blandishments to Mr. Putin — he was assailed at a dinner for Polish intellectuals and artists.

“Don’t you know who you are dealing with?” demanded Adam Michnik, a prominent writer and historian imprisoned several times by the former Communist regime, according to a person present. “Putin’s a brigand!”

To which Mr. Macron responded that he knew very well whom he was dealing with, but given the American pivot to Asia it was in Europe’s interest to develop a dialogue with Russia and avoid a strengthened Russian-Chinese partnership. The Poles were unimpressed.

Mr. Macron’s approach to Mr. Putin is consistent with his relations with other strongmen. He has engaged with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia — men whose views of human rights and liberal democracy are far removed from his own — in the belief that he can bring them around.

Up to now, the results have appeared paltry, as they were when he tried to forge a bond with Mr. Trump that proved short-lived.

The French president's own views on the critical importance of the rule of law and respect for human rights have been a constant of his politics. His strong condemnation of the treatment of [Aleksei A. Navalny](#), the imprisoned Russian dissident, irked Mr. Putin. He has made it clear that the [annexation of Crimea](#) will never be accepted by France. Engagement has not meant abandonment of principle, even if its endpoint is unclear.

Mr. Macron has also maneuvered effectively to use the Normandy Format, a grouping of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, to bolster the cease-fire agreement the countries brokered in eastern Ukraine in 2015. This diplomatic format has the added attraction for him of showcasing Europeans trying to solve European problems. The French goal in the crisis is clear: "de-escalation," a word often repeated.

If the president can be seen to have played a central role in achieving that, he will bolster his position in the election, where he currently leads in polls. The downside risk of his Russian gambit was put this way by Michel Duclos, a diplomat, in a recent book on France in the world: "The more it appears that Mr. Macron gains no substantial results through dialogue, the more that dialogue cuts into his political capital in the United States and in anti-Russian European countries."

Nonetheless, Mr. Macron seems certain to persist. He is convinced that Europe must be remade to take account of a changed world. A degree of mutual fascination appears to bind him and Mr. Putin.

The senior French official observed that the Russian president had told Mr. Macron that "he was the only person with whom he could have such profound discussions and that he was committed to the dialogue."

That will be music to the French president's ears.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Inflation strong, wages rise, spending falls
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/business/pce-inflation-federal-reserve.html?">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/business/pce-inflation-federal-reserve.html?</a>
GIST	<p>Inflation came in strong and wage growth remained elevated at the end of 2021. At the same time, consumer spending fell in December as spiraling coronavirus caseloads kept many Americans at home and persistent supply chain bottlenecks disrupted holiday shopping.</p> <p>Those indicators, released on Friday, underline that despite plummeting unemployment and a <a href="#">strong rebound</a> in growth, the economy — like the country itself — has yet to break free of the pandemic's grip. That is making for a confusing and contradictory moment headed into 2022.</p> <p>Rising prices and an unflagging pandemic are slowing spending, denting consumer optimism and detracting from quickly climbing pay and unusually rapid overall growth. People are predicting worse financial outcomes for themselves and <a href="#">higher inflation</a> as the virus lingers and uncertainty deepens, bad news for policymakers who are just beginning to try to tame price increases.</p> <p>The Personal Consumption Expenditures index, the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, rose 5.8 percent in the year ending in December, up from 5.7 percent the prior month. Prices are climbing at the fastest pace since 1982.</p> <p>Even as inflation moderates somewhat on a monthly basis, it remains unusually fast, and pay is picking up briskly. Robust wage growth can be good news for workers, but it also increases the risk of sustained high inflation: Companies may raise prices to try to cover rising labor costs.</p> <p>The Employment Cost Index, a measure of pay and benefits that the Fed watches closely, climbed by slightly less in the final quarter of 2021 than economists had predicted but capped a year in which workers won big wage increases.</p>

Overall compensation [climbed 4 percent](#) in the fourth quarter compared with the prior year, the data showed, and wages and salaries picked up 4.5 percent. Both were the fastest pace of increase since the data series started two decades ago — though they failed to [keep up with inflation](#) on average.

“Overall wage growth, on a nominal basis, is still pretty strong,” said Omair Sharif, the founder of Inflation Insights, referring to the wage growth that has not been adjusted for price increases. “The downside is that inflation is eating away at all of these nominal gains.”

As price gains chip away at consumers’ earnings, they also are eroding voter sentiment, making inflation a political liability for the Biden administration and Democrats during a midterm election year.

President Biden and his advisers have been trying to emphasize the positives, arguing that, despite inflation, the economy overall has experienced a historically strong rebound over the past year. Unemployment has fallen and wages have been rising, particularly for the lowest-paid workers. On Thursday, the Commerce Department said the broadest measure of the economy, gross domestic product, grew 5.7 percent in 2021, the [biggest gain since 1984](#).

But the data released Friday complicated that narrative. Consumer spending [fell 0.6 percent](#) in December, the first decrease since February. Forecasters expect further declines in early 2022 as the Omicron wave of the coronavirus keeps workers at home and further disrupts supply chains.

And while pay is still climbing quickly for low-wage workers, those gains are no longer keeping up with inflation. Wages and salaries for leisure and hospitality workers rose 1.6 percent in the final three months of the year, less than the increase in prices over the same period as measured by either major inflation index.

Prices began to rise last year as global supply lines struggled to keep pace with demand for couches, cars and other goods. Officials had hoped those pressures would fade fast, but instead inflation has lingered and broadened into categories that are especially salient to consumers, like food and rent.

The White House has [taken steps](#) aimed at relieving pressure on choked supply chains to try to bring inflation down around the edges, but the job of slowing demand to bring prices under control rests primarily with the Fed.

The Fed’s policymakers have signaled that they likely will begin to raise interest rates at their March meeting as they try to prevent today’s quick price increases from becoming a more permanent feature of the economic landscape. Economists expect several rate increases this year, but how many is uncertain — J.P. Morgan now expects five, while Krishna Guha at Evercore ISI wrote in a note on Friday that it is plausible the Fed could hike anywhere between three and seven times.

Markets are nervously eyeing the Fed’s next steps, with stocks falling in the first three weeks of the year as investors tried to gauge how fast it will move. Higher borrowing costs could slow down economic growth and lower stock prices, taking some of the buoyancy out of the recovery. But the S&P 500 rallied on Friday after the latest reports, jumping 2.4 percent and avoiding a fourth consecutive weekly loss.

Economists do expect inflation to fade this year, and Fed officials have projected that it will ease to less than 3 percent by the end of 2022. But they are watching for signs that it might instead linger, especially at a time when the world’s trade system remains under pronounced stress and it is unclear whether consumer spending is decelerating or hitting a pandemic-induced bump before roaring back.

“We are attentive to the risks that persistent real wage growth in excess of productivity could put upward pressure on inflation,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed’s chair, [said during a news conference](#) on Wednesday. Friday’s data could offer officials some slight reprieve.

In December, Mr. Powell specifically cited the previous Employment Cost Index reading — which showed big wage increases in the third quarter — as one reason the Fed had decided to shift from stoking growth to preparing to fight inflation.

The fact that the measure did not pick up as sharply as expected in the final quarter of the year could give investors some confidence that the central bank's policy-setting group, the Federal Open Market Committee, will not further speed up its plans to withdraw economic help.

“With labor participation creeping higher and measures of excess demand flattening in recent months, it is reasonable to think that wage growth is unlikely to reaccelerate dramatically,” Ian Shepherdson, the chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, wrote following the release. “In the meantime, this report eases the immediate pressure on the F.O.M.C. to act aggressively.”

The data released on Friday contained some other encouraging signs. Consumer spending on services rose, including in categories like travel and movies that were badly bruised by the pandemic, while goods spending fell, suggesting that spending patterns continued to normalize after two years of disruptions. That should ease pressure on supply chains over time.

And while Omicron's impact was clear in the overall spending numbers, there is little evidence the latest wave of cases has done more lasting damage to the economy, at least so far. Personal income rose 0.3 percent in December, led by an 0.7 percent increase in wage and salary income.

But households show little sign of optimism. The [University of Michigan consumer sentiment survey](#) has been faltering for months as prices have risen, and the index nose-dived in January [to its lowest level](#) since late 2011, when the economy was slogging back from the global financial crisis, according to data released on Friday.

[The Conference Board's index](#) of confidence also ticked down this month.

“You have very high inflation, so people are seeing an erosion of their purchasing power,” said Dana M. Peterson, the chief economist at The Conference Board, noting that the resurgent virus is also to blame. “People will have higher confidence once we're beyond Omicron.”

For now, economic uncertainty is dominating.

Ashley Fahr, the owner of La Cuisine, a culinary company and event space in Venice, Calif., said rising grocery costs began to bite at a difficult moment — just before Omicron surged, causing people to pull back from activities like the cooking classes and catering events she offers.

She noticed in December that her food bill had gone up by about 15 percent, chipping away at her margins, and she passed about 5 percent of that on to customers while absorbing the rest of the increase. “I didn't want to quote a number people would balk at,” she said.

Ms. Fahr said that she pays her workers — most of whom are independent contractors — competitive wages and that it's hard to keep up with rising prices and still turn a profit. She is watching to see what other local caterers and cooking classes do with their pricing, and whether they begin to pass on the full increase to customers.

“If everyone else does it, I'll do it too,” Ms. Fahr said.

That sort of logic is what economic officials worry about. If businesses and consumers begin to expect prices to rise steadily, they may begin to plan for those increases instead of resisting them. When inflation gets baked into expectations, it might spiral upward year after year, economists worry.

	<p>The University of Michigan’s inflation expectations measure showed that <a href="#">five-year projections</a> climbed to <a href="#">3.1 percent</a>, the highest since 2009. Fed officials have a history of watching that number along with market-based expectations, which have been <a href="#">slowly nudging higher</a>.</p> <p>“What we’re trying to do is get inflation, keep inflation expectations well anchored at 2 percent,” Mr. Powell, the Fed chair, said at his news conference this week. “That’s always the ultimate goal.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Omicron hit later in states, cases start drop</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/29/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#virus-cases-are-starting-to-drop-in-states-where-omicron-hit-later">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/29/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#virus-cases-are-starting-to-drop-in-states-where-omicron-hit-later</a>
GIST	<p>States where the Omicron variant began skyrocketing in late December — weeks after setting off spikes in states like New York — appear to be turning a corner, with new infections starting to decline.</p> <p>If that trend holds, it would be an encouraging sign that the United States may be through the worst of the Omicron wave.</p> <p><a href="#">In Arizona, the seven-day average of daily cases fell from a peak of 20,778 on Monday</a> to 18,208 on Friday, a roughly 12 percent decrease over five days, according to a New York Times database. <a href="#">Cases in Utah have declined 35 percent</a> and <a href="#">in Mississippi 25 percent</a> since peaking on Jan. 19. Cases in <a href="#">North Dakota have fallen 19 percent</a> since a Jan. 22 peak.</p> <p>While these states are early in their downswings, they appear so far to be following a similar trend to states where the Omicron surge began earlier. Those states in turn have been following a similar pattern to South Africa, where the variant was identified in November and <a href="#">where case averages have plummeted 87 percent from a mid-December peak</a>.</p> <p>But national case numbers, while falling <a href="#">31 percent in the past two weeks</a>, are still astronomical. The daily average remains around 590,000 a day — more than double the worst statistics from last winter. Hospitalizations, which lag cases, appear to be peaking and are likewise higher than last winter’s peak. Deaths, which lag more, are still increasing and have also passed last winter’s peak in some places, though not nationally.</p> <p>Even <a href="#">in New York</a> and <a href="#">New Jersey</a>, which are farther ahead on the curve than many states and have seen the seven-day case average fall more than 70 percent, the average is still higher than the peak of last winter’s wave.</p> <p>And in some states, like <a href="#">Alaska</a> and <a href="#">Washington</a>, cases are still rising.</p> <p>Last weekend, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the country’s top infectious disease expert, told ABC News that he believed the wave would crest in the remaining states by the end of February. What comes after that <a href="#">is much less clear</a>.</p> <p>New variants could develop, given that vast areas of the world are still largely unvaccinated. The immunity granted by vaccines — or by recovery from Omicron — might or might not hold up against those new variants.</p> <p>And as wave after wave has shown over the past two years, circumstances can change quickly.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Higher omicron risk: underlying conditions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/health/omicron-chronic-illness.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/health/omicron-chronic-illness.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>

Regina Perez, 57, had never been hospitalized for her lifelong asthma condition until she came down with Covid this month.

She started having difficulty breathing, even after taking her usual medications. “It kind of took over, almost,” she said. She wound up at St. Luke’s Hospital in Allentown, Pa., for most of a week at a time when nearly all the Covid patients sampled had contracted the Omicron variant.

The episode frightened her. While doctors were able to get her asthma and breathing under control, “I’ll probably be scared for the rest of my life,” she said. Ms. Perez, who was fully vaccinated and is now recovering at home, said she had spent the last two years doing everything she could to avoid infection, including working from home and rarely going out. She has not yet gotten a booster shot.

Throughout the pandemic, people like Ms. Perez have been at higher risk for serious illness from Covid because they have underlying medical conditions, like asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease. More than half of American adults have at least one [underlying chronic condition](#), and for many of them, the Omicron wave hasn’t been as mild as it has for the larger, healthier populations around the world.

Omicron has indeed caused far lower rates of severe illness and death in the U.S. population, especially among those who are vaccinated and have received booster shots. Still, the variant’s high transmissibility did lead to record-setting case counts that resulted in pandemic-high hospitalizations.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, warned on Wednesday that this surge was still imposing a heavy burden. “Importantly, ‘milder’ does not mean ‘mild,’” she said. “And we cannot look past the strain on our health systems and substantial number of deaths — nearing 2,200 a day as a result of the extremely transmissible Omicron variant.”

In the last few weeks, the rate of hospitalization has declined considerably in some regions, where Omicron first arrived and sent case counts soaring. While [a smaller share](#) of people with the variant are being hospitalized, according to [a recent report from researchers at the C.D.C.](#), the soaring number of Omicron infections has led to higher admissions than in previous surges. Nationally, hospitalizations are still averaging [about 150,000 people](#), including many rural regions where facilities are stretched thin.

“Our experience is that it’s worse right now than it’s ever been,” said Craig Thompson, chief executive of Golden Valley Memorial Healthcare, a small rural hospital in Clinton, Mo. This month, the Covid, heart attack and stroke patients that the hospital would typically transfer to larger facilities were boarded in the emergency room for days. Staff members made about 200 phone calls to get beds for patients — at times up to 400 miles away.

The majority of those hospitalized with severe illness during the Omicron surge are unvaccinated, public health experts say. But some who were vaccinated and have underlying conditions have also been at risk for more serious illness caused by the virus, and for the infection potentially worsening their existing diseases, increasing their chances of hospitalization.

While they may not be hospitalized for respiratory illnesses, “we are seeing some exacerbation of other conditions in individuals who are vulnerable,” said Dr. Sandra Nelson, an infectious disease specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital and an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. In some cases, patients were dehydrated from the effects of a virus infection and came in with kidney failure.

Doctors say that it is not always clear what role Omicron plays, but there is a plausible biological explanation for a virus causing patients to develop systemic issues. “You’re going to see kidneys get worse, etc.,” said Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos, a critical care specialist and assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine.

At St. Luke’s, where Ms. Perez was admitted, roughly two-thirds of the coronavirus-positive patients in the system’s network had a primary diagnosis of Covid, but an additional 15 to 20 percent were diagnosed



with other illnesses, like sepsis or acute kidney failure, that doctors said were clearly related to a virus infection.

“It isn’t an incidental diagnosis,” said Dr. Jeffrey Jahre, an infectious disease specialist who is senior vice president for medical and academic affairs at St. Luke’s University Health Network, which operates 11 hospitals in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

In some cases, these patients may have had a “smoldering” case of diabetes or hypertension that a Covid case pushed over into serious illness, said Dr. Nicholas Kman, an emergency physician at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center in Columbus. In other cases, individuals who had successfully been managing their conditions before becoming infected, like Ms. Perez, are coming in with high blood sugar levels or worrying hypertension.

Others, like transplant or cancer patients — although fully vaccinated — are not able to mount a sufficient immune response to protect themselves from serious disease when they become infected.

Doctors say these admissions — often categorized as “with” Covid rather than “for” Covid — have had significant effects on stressed hospitals. “All those patients add to the surge and the volume,” Dr. Kman said, adding that “one or two extra patients can push a health system over the edge.”

Hospitals at maximum capacity have also been dealing with nationwide shortages of basic supplies that are needed to care for patients with complicated conditions, including intravenous bags of saline solution, small syringes of saline solution and small plastic tubes to take blood samples.

Frontline nurses, already parceling out a few minutes an hour to each patient under their care, say juggling unfamiliar products or adjusting to workarounds makes their jobs even more fraught.

The caseloads have had a rippling effect, far more pronounced in this wave than in others. Severe staffing shortages at nursing homes and dialysis clinics have made it difficult to discharge patients from the hospital who were still positive for the coronavirus, said Dr. David Margolius, an internal medicine specialist at MetroHealth in Cleveland. Some facilities do not accept Covid patients, and others have been so short-staffed that there are no openings.

“With Covid, for Covid, it’s putting so much stress on the health care system because of the implications of having Covid for placement,” he said.

Other patients at high risk — including pregnant women — have also become seriously ill. Alex Chandler, 27, a teacher in Killeen, Texas, who was vaccinated and had received a booster shot, was diagnosed with Covid when she gave birth on Jan. 9, according to her mother, Jenny Clay. That week, Omicron made up 99.7 percent of the Covid cases in Texas and surrounding states, [federal data show](#).

Initially her throat felt as if she had swallowed broken glass, and her chills were hard to shake. But her symptoms gave way to the consuming care of her firstborn child, Beau.

Five days after giving birth, Ms. Chandler sought follow-up care for her son, and staff members noticed that she was breathing heavily, Ms. Clay said. Her oxygen saturation read 76 percent, far lower than the typical 95 to 100 percent.

A C.D.C. spokeswoman, Belsie González, said that women have higher heart rates, lower lung capacity and immune system changes during pregnancy. Nearly all of the pregnant women admitted to critical care in Europe were unvaccinated, according to a study [published Friday](#).

Her mother said she was admitted to the hospital on Jan. 14, and developed pneumonia and a pneumothorax, or punctured lung, a known [Covid-19 complication](#). By the following morning, she had been put on a ventilator, and she is in the intensive care unit at AdventHealth Central Texas in Killeen. Ms. Clay has been helping care for her grandson. She noticed that he has his mother’s eyes and like his mother as a newborn, he eats well and rarely cries.



“I’m just thinking, ‘His mom should be here and sharing this with me,’” Ms. Clay said. She documented the first precious days, planning to share with her daughter later. At nearly two weeks on the ventilator, Ms. Clay said, her daughter showed some signs of progress but then lost ground. “They said when it’s time, we’ll know,” Ms. Clay said. “There’s not really a lot of hope right now.”

Others who have trouble mounting an immune response are among those hospitalized in this Omicron wave. Dr. Craig Bunnell, the chief medical officer at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, said the strikingly high number of infections — even with Omicron’s reduced virulence — had led to the increased rate of hospitalizations among cancer patients. “The I.C.U.s are still full,” Dr. Bunnell said. “The beds are still full.”

He said the newly available treatments, including monoclonal antibodies and antiviral pills, remained in [very short supply](#). Those who are getting very sick resemble the patients from previous waves.

Some of the patients seen by Dr. Natalia Solenkova, an intensive care physician who works at hospitals in Florida and Tennessee, are organ transplant recipients who she said “did what they were supposed to do” by getting vaccines and booster shots. They are typically on immune-suppressing drugs that keep their bodies from rejecting a donor organ, which makes them highly vulnerable to Covid.

“They are very sick,” Dr. Solenkova said. “Many are on ventilators and on life support and they are dying.”

Amanda Halks, 36, of Tampa, Fla., who was vaccinated and had a booster, had succeeded in avoiding Covid until the last day of December, when Omicron was responsible for [95 percent of the cases](#) in Florida. She had survived a difficult eight-day hospitalization with pneumonia in 2011 and feared any residual damage would make her susceptible to a severe case.

Her fears came to pass on Jan. 11, when she was admitted to a Tampa hospital with her blood oxygen level just below 80. While her hospital stay was brief, her oxygen levels have continued to drop with mild exertion. She was diagnosed with post-Covid MIS-A, or multisystem inflammatory syndrome.

She bristles at the notion that the Omicron variant is mild. She recounted joking with a friend that it is “hot and spicy.”

Dr. Mark Lewis, a cancer specialist at Intermountain Healthcare in Salt Lake City, said he had found that Omicron presents in patients as “a completely different beast.” While the variant appears less likely to descend into a patient’s lungs and cause pneumonia, it may still result in a patient’s condition flaring up. “It’s a profoundly inflammatory state,” Dr. Lewis said.

Ms. Clay said her daughter’s precarious condition was a clear sign that Omicron is not always mild, a notion she views as dismissive and stemming from those fatigued by the lengthy pandemic.

“I know we all want to be done, but it’s not time to be done,” Ms. Clay said. “This is serious and it’s not over.”

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HEADLINE	01/29 New York Covid cases fall by 50% in week
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/29/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#new-york-coronavirus-cases-fell-by-50-percent-in-the-past-week">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/29/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#new-york-coronavirus-cases-fell-by-50-percent-in-the-past-week</a>
GIST	<p>New coronavirus cases in New York State fell by more than 50 percent over the past week, continuing a steep downward trend for one of the first states to be hit hard by the Omicron variant, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced on Saturday.</p> <p>The state recorded about 12,300 coronavirus cases on Friday, compared with roughly 27,600 on the previous Friday, according to the health department’s data.</p>

“We’re getting through this winter surge and we know what to do,” Governor Hochul [said in a statement on Saturday](#). “We know how to handle this.”

Hospitalizations were also falling. There were 7,675 people hospitalized with Covid-19 statewide on Friday, a decrease of about 500 from the day before. More than 10,000 people were hospitalized with Covid-19 the previous Friday.

This and other recent data have shown that the latest surge in cases driven by the Omicron variant is subsiding from its peak earlier this month. Eastern states that were affected early by the highly contagious variant have seen especially pronounced declines, with the seven-day daily average of new cases down more than 70 percent over the last two weeks in New York and New Jersey, according to a New York Times database.

[Cases have also started to decline](#) in several states where the Omicron variant caused a spike in cases weeks after the first upward surge in New York, an encouraging sign that those parts of the United States may be through the worst of the current wave.

In New York, there were signs that deaths were also starting to flatten or decline, as the seven-day average dropped to 195 on Friday from 211 on Jan. 19, according to the Times database.

Governor Hochul, who imposed a mask mandate in December as cases spiked, encouraged New Yorkers to get vaccinated and use their masks to maintain the progress the state had made. “So let’s use the tools — vaccines, boosters and masks — let’s be safe, and we’ll get through this together as we always have,” she said on Saturday.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Job of TV meteorologist gets more serious</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/business/meteorologists-storm-weather-climate-change.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/business/meteorologists-storm-weather-climate-change.html</a>
GIST	<p>After the remains of Hurricane Ida dumped <a href="#">historic levels of rain</a> in the Northeast last year, ABC News’s chief meteorologist, Ginger Zee, stood in front of a collapsed bridge in New Jersey and gave viewers of “Good Morning America” a clear warning.</p> <p>“Human-induced” global warming does not cause storms like Hurricane Ida to happen in the first place, Ms. Zee said. But the warmer ocean temperatures do make them more destructive.</p> <p>“Extreme events that would have already happened,” she said, “are going to become more extreme.”</p> <p>The job of TV weather reporter is changing along with the weather.</p> <p>For decades, the men and women taking their best educated guess about the weather provided a respite from grim news reports, often playing a comic foil to the anchors. Before Willard Scott became the most prominent weatherman of the 1980s on NBC’s “Today Show,” he had played Ronald McDonald and Bozo the Clown.</p> <p>But Ms. Zee and her colleagues see themselves as tracking maybe the most serious story of our time. Increasingly destructive weather had already <a href="#">given</a> TV meteorologists a more visceral presence in viewers’ lives. In the last few years, though, they have often gone out of their way to remind viewers explicitly that human-created climate change is a real and disruptive force that has put lives and the environment at risk.</p> <p>“As a scientist and someone who understands the atmosphere, I have not only a passion but a true connection to climate science,” Ms. Zee, who majored in meteorology at Valparaiso University, said in an interview.</p>

On CNN, the meteorologist Derek Van Dam dipped into international politics in October with a [report](#) on the link between climate change and migration crises. The Weather Channel [announced](#) last summer it would increase its coverage of climate change. Even local broadcasters known for five-day forecasts are no longer avoiding the topic.

“During the weathercast, you generally want to give people what they’re looking for at that moment,” said Jeff Berardelli, who moved to NBC’s Tampa affiliate in November after time as a national meteorologist for CBS News. “But when the opportunity presents itself, I will put it into its climate context.”

In an [article](#) on Friday about the weekend’s impending snowstorm in the Northeast, Mr. Berardelli reported that warming waters off the Northeast were probably the cause of far more frequent major winter weather events. The Tampa Bay area is also getting a share of extreme weather, with freezing temperatures expected on Sunday, which Mr. Berardelli said could be related to the storm a thousand miles away.

Al Roker, the weather and feature anchor of NBC’s “Today” show and a longtime co-host, said that NBC News’s climate unit — the weather unit’s new name as of 2019 — does not try to “force the issue or beat you over the head.” Instead, he said, the group draws careful correlations between severe weather events and climate change.

In 2021, the unit offered more than 50 segments that concerned climate change, untethered to weather forecasts — about drought in the West, wet summers, rapidly intensifying hurricanes — compared with roughly 20 in 2019, Mr. Roker said.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of a [summit](#) at the White House of more than 100 national and local television forecasters. Then-President Bill Clinton hoped that they would communicate the realities of global warming to the public.

But many of the meteorologists and climate scientists interviewed for this article said the trend of weather personalities broadcasting frankly about man-made global warming was much more recent, as the consequences of climate change have grown starker. The topic has remained politically divisive, with many conservatives — including former President Donald J. Trump — dismissive of the overwhelming scientific consensus.

The meteorologist Amy Freeze (her given name, she noted) said that Fox Weather, the 24-hour streaming channel started in October, has acknowledged the issue. The channel was set to [take over](#) Fox Business’s airwaves Saturday morning and afternoon (as well as one early-morning hour on Fox News) in deference to the weekend’s storm. She conceded that the topic is fraught “in the political arena.”

“Our job is to help people live better and to give them information and tools they can use in the here and the now,” Ms. Freeze said. “So we are going to cover climate change.”

James Spann, a meteorologist at ABC’s affiliate in Birmingham, Ala., [wrote](#) in a Medium article last year that he mostly eschews explicit mentions of climate to avoid alienating some viewers. “Say anything about climate and you lose half your audience,” he said.

Other forecasters insisted that positive feedback for climate coverage far outweighed negative responses. “I don’t look at my position as a bully pulpit,” Mr. Roker said. “It’s informational. You can open more eyes by just presenting facts.

“Our management and producers don’t underestimate our audience,” he added. “I think politicians may.”

More than 1,000 TV meteorologists receive free weekly [bursts](#) of information, data and visuals on links between the weather and climate change from Climate Central, a nonprofit [organization](#) that works with journalists to publicize facts about climate change. Forecasters, said Bernadette Woods Placky, Climate Central’s chief meteorologist, “have been at the forefront of making these connections to the public.”

Several meteorologists said they used Climate Central's pitches and materials on-air. Elizabeth Robaina, the meteorologist for Telemundo's affiliate in San Juan, P.R., said she has used its Spanish-language graphics.

Emily Gracey Miller, until last year the meteorologist at ABC's affiliate in Charleston, S.C., praised Climate Central for responsibly conveying climate news in relevant and not didactic ways.

"They would say things like, 'Here's how warmer temperatures over the past decade have influenced [beer production](#),'" she said.

Ms. Miller's former channel is owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group, which in the past has [asked](#) its stations to run politically conservative news items. Ms. Miller said she felt able to discuss man-made climate change on-air. A Sinclair representative did not respond to a request for comment.

Ms. Zee, the first female chief meteorologist at a major broadcast network, said she became interested in the weather during her childhood watching storms develop over Lake Michigan. As a teenager, she saw a future version of herself in the storm-chasing meteorologist played by Helen Hunt in the 1996 movie "Twister."

Now, she hosts a recurring feature on climate change with the title "It's Not Too Late," including a 50-minute special around last Earth Day that streamed on Hulu. She recently added the titles of chief climate correspondent and managing editor of a new ABC News unit devoted to climate change. Topics she reports on include those only adjacent to the weather, such as carbon renewal technologies.

"Someone said, 'Why did you change into such an advocate?'" Ms. Zee said. "Well, I've always been in love with the atmosphere, considerate of it, respecting it. But, mostly, this is just science. At the end of the day, I'm just telling you the science."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Strong winter storm slams Northeast</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/nyregion/winter-storm-northeast.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/nyregion/winter-storm-northeast.html</a>
GIST	<p>Packing raking winds, blinding snows and piercing cold, a powerful, fast-moving winter storm roared up the East Coast on Saturday, bringing power outages, disrupted travel and general misery to millions of residents from the Carolinas to Maine.</p> <p>The worst of the storm was felt across the Northeast, particularly in New England, where <a href="#">gusting winds blew snow sideways</a>, while flood-prone coastal areas watched warily as a storm surge pounded beaches and sea walls.</p> <p>Power outages were still affecting <a href="#">nearly 70,000 Massachusetts residents</a> as of early Sunday morning, and broader blackouts remained an ongoing concern with high winds threatening to snap snow-covered branches and cripple power lines as the storm churned offshore.</p> <p>"It's a classic blizzard," said Glenn Field, a meteorologist with the <a href="#">National Weather Service in Norton, Mass.</a>, which noted that some areas in Massachusetts had received <a href="#">three to four inches of snow per hour</a> on Saturday morning, according to radar estimates. Heavy snow continued through the afternoon, with wind gusts of more than 70 miles per hour in some locations, creating whiteout conditions.</p> <p>Indeed, the tempest's intensity and drifting snow <a href="#">made even measuring the accumulation difficult</a>, though the storm was shaping up to be the biggest of the season in some regions, and maybe one of the biggest in decades. The National Weather Service <a href="#">said the 23.6 inches of snow that fell on Saturday</a> tied the single-day record for Boston, set in 2003.</p> <p>The wicked weather may have also claimed more than one life. In Nassau County, east of New York City, police were investigating the death of an elderly woman found dead inside her car at around 2:45 a.m.,</p>

with at least one of the car's windows open. And in Toms River, N.J., a man went into cardiac arrest and died while operating a snowblower, according to the Ocean County sheriff, Michael Mastronardy.

The intense storm was characterized as a "[bomb cyclone](#)," in which barometric pressure drops rapidly over 24 hours, producing high winds. As storms like this one move over coastal waters, they pick up moisture, resulting in heavy snow.

The storm's speed and ferocity, predicted for days, were being felt up and down the Interstate 95 corridor. There was significant snowfall in Southern cities [like Asheville, N.C.](#), and [bitter cold was predicted](#) overnight in locales like Charleston, S.C., part of a [Southern cold snap](#).

There was coastal flooding on Saturday afternoon [on Cape Cod](#) and in [the streets of Nantucket](#), where gusts more akin to those in a tropical storm were felt. Nantucket officials and American Red Cross volunteers had opened an emergency warming shelter at the high school as power outages persisted and temperatures dipped. Emergency centers were also open on the Cape, and ferries to and from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard had been canceled as of Saturday.

Forecasters cautioned that storm would continue to bring snow and strong winds into the evening before heading out over the Atlantic, where it could create 30-foot swells for any boat unlucky enough to be caught in open water. Tides were also predicted to rise on shore on Saturday evening, raising the specter of additional flooding.

In a late-afternoon briefing on Saturday, Gov. Charlie Baker of Massachusetts said his state was "not quite out of the woods," noting that travel conditions were treacherous and that road cleanup, removal of snow and restoring of power could take several days. As much as 30 inches of snow had fallen in some parts of the state by early Saturday evening, he said.

Blizzard conditions — the blinding combination of snow and wind — were already confirmed in at least four states, including Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

In Boston, the storm was drawing comparisons to the [Blizzard of '78](#), which buried the city in more than two feet of snow and [caused serious flooding](#). Boston residents seemed to be holing up or battenning down, though one group of about a dozen diners could be seen brunching — and drinking mimosas — at Frenchie, a restaurant on Tremont Street, in spite of the weather.

One of the bistro's employees, Vanessa Fitzgerald, 39, said she had come to work despite a harrowing drive there with her husband that morning. "It was nerve-racking," she said. "I was like, 'I'm going to die.'"

She added, "I think I'm going to sleep here tonight."

Those out in the weather likened it to a snow globe, with winds twirling falling snowflakes while taking fresh powder off rooftops and cars and adding it to the swirl.

"It's hard, it's tiring; when the wind hits your face, it hurts," said Eddy Sasso, who was motoring a four-wheeler with a plow on the front to clear sidewalks in Queens and who had ice visible in his goatee and eyebrows. He had been at it for 12 hours, he said, and would stop "whenever it stops."

That said, New York City seemed to have dodged the brunt of the storm, even as bands of snow and wind clobbered the Jersey Shore, eastern Long Island and Connecticut, and points north. By late afternoon, Islip, N.Y., on Long Island, had [gotten more than two feet](#), the most of any location in the tristate area, followed in short order by Groton, Conn., and Bayville, N.J.

In [Rhode Island](#), travel restrictions were in place [until Saturday evening](#), with large trucks, except those carrying emergency supplies, barred from driving on all roads. Similar steps were taken in Connecticut,

where Gov. Ned Lamont said some “terrible accidents” had occurred involving tractor-trailers. He pleaded with residents to stay off the road but praised their hardiness.

“This is New England,” he told CNN. “We are prepared for this.”

Governors in New Jersey and New York had [preemptively declared states of emergency](#) in expectation of the storm, even as airlines canceled nearly 2,000 flights at three major hubs — [Kennedy International Airport](#), [Newark Liberty International Airport](#) and [Boston Logan International Airport](#) — according to FlightAware, which tracks aviation data. Sunday was also looking like a bad travel day in the region as well, with more than 1,000 flights already canceled.

“We’re in throes of this nor’easter — it is a serious one,” Gov. Kathy Hochul of New York said at a storm briefing on Saturday morning, adding that the cold blast accompanying the storm, and the potential for loss of power, could be life-threatening. “You cannot have people in their homes without heat for any length of time.”

Facing a major weather event during his first month in office, Mayor Eric Adams of New York City warned residents to stay inside. “It’s best to be off the roads,” he said, standing on a blustery sidewalk on Tiffany Street in the Bronx. “Be careful. Bundle up. Good day to stay at home if you don’t have to go out.”

That said, some city residents viewed the Saturday snow day as a treat, with dog owners taking their pets to a pillowy Central Park for walks. “She loves the snow,” said Nancy Nelson, 65, an Upper West Side resident, who was with Callie, her 8-year-old dog. “She’s already belly-crawled all the way across the street.”

Those who dared drive, however, were often facing daunting conditions, even with lighter weekend traffic. For the most part, the subways were running regularly, though the Long Island Rail Road [suspended its service](#) midmorning and service was limited on the Metro North Railroad. Amtrak canceled all of its high-speed Acela trains between New York and Washington, as well as its routes between New York and Boston.

Even some professional drivers were wary. In Long Island City, Jeff Lopez, who had been making fuel deliveries since 3 a.m., said the condition of the roads was bad enough that he was knocking off early because of the slippery conditions. “It’s pretty bad out there,” he said.

Forecasters said that the storm’s speed and accompanying cold — [subzero wind chills](#) were reported across the Northeast — might lessen the potential for loss of power, noting that the conditions produced lighter, more powdery snow that was less likely to weigh down trees and power lines. Areas around Bangor, Maine, were predicted to experience severe cold, including wind chills as low as 20 below zero.

The storm could also be a boon for ski areas in the Northeast, many of which have not had enough snow this year to fully open their trails. Among them was Mount Sunapee in New Hampshire, where snow-making had been a challenge because of warmer temperatures. Sunapee had received about six inches by midday.

Still, the conditions were often unpleasant for many who dared to venture out. In places like suburban Monmouth County, N.J., with snow drifts deeper than a foot and whipping wind, residents were essentially homebound. Conditions were even worse near the Atlantic, where the Weather Service said that nearly 16 inches of snow had fallen in some areas by around 8 a.m., making travel “extremely dangerous.”

Gov. Phil Murphy of New Jersey said his state had dispatched 3,000 pieces of equipment to clear roads and aid travelers. “It’s a statewide event, but the shore is getting clobbered,” he said on WCBS-TV, adding that the cleanup “won’t be overnight.”



	<p>On the eastern end of Long Island, residents were trying to soldier on, even as the snow continued to accumulate. Jens Lester, 78, a lifelong resident of Amagansett, said he had seen blizzards like this one before but remained worried about the power going out, because his generator, he discovered yesterday, wouldn't start up.</p> <p>Most winters, Mr. Lester said, he would be in Florida or the Caribbean, but the pandemic had made traveling difficult.</p> <p>"I wish I was there now," he said. "I think a lot of people do."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/30 Covid's lasting impact on taste, smell</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/30/like-sewage-and-rotting-flesh-covids-lasting-impact-on-taste-and-smell">https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/30/like-sewage-and-rotting-flesh-covids-lasting-impact-on-taste-and-smell</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Four months after getting sick with Covid, Anne-Héloise Dautel couldn't eat anything at all. "I just wanted to vomit, I was gagging at everything around me," she said. "I couldn't even stand my own smell. I was showering five times a day." Coffee, toothpaste, shampoo and roast meat were the worst. By the time she went to hospital, she weighed just 46kg.</p> <p>Severe weight loss and kidney failure are some of the impacts of smell and taste distortions which leave people unable to eat or drink things they loved, like coffee or bacon, because they smell like rotting flesh or sewage.</p> <p>The loss of taste or smell was identified as a Covid symptom very early in the pandemic, and there is growing evidence that a substantial number of people go on to develop long-term distortions to their senses.</p> <p>AbScent, a UK-based support group for people with taste and smell disorders, occupied a tiny niche before the pandemic, with 1,500 members. Now it has 76,000 worldwide.</p> <p>Scientists at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden last week published a study that found nearly half of the infected people it studied in the first wave had experienced distorted smell, a condition known as parosmia. A third were less able to detect smells, according to the pre-print, which has not yet been peer reviewed.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics estimates that more than 500,000 people in the UK have been suffering Covid symptoms for more than a year.</p> <p>"There's been an explosion of these kinds of syndromes and symptoms," said Simon Gane, a consultant rhinologist at the Royal National Ear, Nose and Throat and Eastman Dental Hospitals in London. "It's much more widespread than before."</p> <p>Many sufferers of parosmia and dysgeusia – the distorted sense of taste – began to experience the condition weeks or months after recovering from Covid, he said. Some had developed a total loss of smell – anosmia – and had started to recover it.</p> <p>"I felt I was losing my brain. They taught me to try to remember how to smell," said Dautel, a 32-year-old architect who lives in London and spent 10 weeks at a hospital in Rennes, Brittany, being treated alongside stroke patients.</p> <p>Ellie Phillips, a TV and radio presenter, had Covid in January 2021 then started to notice problems four months later. The 34-year-old abandoned her lockdown habit of going for coffee, then the odour of oil in a frying pan also became unbearable.</p>



Her friends thought she must be pregnant – many women develop aversions to types of food during pregnancy – and then at a wedding reception she was confronted by a bruschetta laden with melted cheese.

“It was like sewage and rotting flesh,” she said. “I’ve smelt open cancer wounds – that’s the closest thing I can say. I was literally sick in the toilet for 20 minutes. I was too embarrassed to tell my friends. When I got home things got progressively worse.”

Phillips lost a substantial amount of weight while doctors tried to diagnose her illness. Now she is surviving on high-calorie protein shakes intended for cancer patients having chemotherapy.

Other cases are equally distressing for sufferers. Christine Dowling’s 16-year-old granddaughter cannot even drink water. Jane Cooper, an artist and marketing director, finds shampoo smells like rotting fish and rice like white spirit. For weeks she thought an animal had died in her flat. An NHS worker developed parosmia two months after losing her smell through Covid. “One of the hardest parts is being intimate with my partner as he doesn’t smell how I remember,” she said. “I couldn’t even bring myself to say this to him as I know how upsetting this would be.”

Many have turned for support to Chrissi Kelly, who founded AbScent after trying to recover her sense of smell after a viral infection in 2012. She has funded and conducted research into the condition with Dr Jane Parker at Reading University. Their most recent paper pinpointed 15 molecular triggers in coffee that trigger parosmia.

“Our olfactory sense is there to alert us to potential danger, and people with parosmia search for words like sewage, burning, electrics to describe it,” said Kelly. “When you question them more closely, they use those words to signify the greatest amount of disgust.

“But the impact goes much deeper. Often people don’t believe them, employers don’t believe them. But think about how important smell is to communicate.”

Dautel said she almost died after leaving her gas hob on. “My partner came back from a run and started screaming at me to get out of the flat.”

But smaller things can be dangerous too. “Morrisons are getting rid of the expiry date on milk and say people should be doing the sniff test. But it smells rotten to me anyway.”

There is no known cure, and although some parosmics find smell training can be helpful, it is not clinically proven. Dautel remains upbeat. She has started to enjoy food again, 15 months later, and has been trying to describe the indescribable smells she experiences. “It’s been a really long process, but today I ate chicken,” she said. “I’d never have been able to do that six months ago. And it was enjoyable. So there’s hope.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Sports, politics, Covid collide at Olympics
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/30/sport-politics-and-covid-collide-at-the-beijing-winter-olympics">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/30/sport-politics-and-covid-collide-at-the-beijing-winter-olympics</a>
GIST	<p>Hosting the <a href="#">Winter Olympics</a> during a pandemic was always going to test the Chinese government, by putting its ever-growing ability to exercise political control and virus containment on a collision course with its enthusiasm for international prestige and status.</p> <p>The 2022 Winter Games, which open on Friday, are being held at a time of particularly intense western criticism of <a href="#">China</a> over human rights abuses, from the mass persecution of Uyghurs in far western Xinjiang – labelled a genocide by the United States – and other groups including Tibetans, to the crushing of Hong Kong’s freedoms.</p>

China denies human rights abuses, but activists have dubbed the gathering in Beijing the “Genocide Games”, and western powers from the US to the UK have announced a diplomatic boycott of the opening ceremony. The exiled campaign group World Uyghur Congress urged: “No one should want another Olympics like this.”

There is so little trust of the host nation that many countries have told their athletes to take [burner phones](#), and cyber security experts warned a health app for Olympians could spy on them and steal health and other personal data.

Further censure has come from environmentalists who have warned for years about the negative impact of hosting the Games – which need a lot of water for snow and ice – in an area of intense water scarcity.

Yet Beijing weathered the controversy when it hosted the Summer Olympics, in 2008, said Susan Brownell of University of Missouri-St Louis, an expert on Chinese sports who was in China for those Games.

Then, high-profile protests dogged the global torch relay, violent suppression of protests in Tibet put Chinese oppression there on the news agenda, there was pressure on leaders to skip the opening ceremony and environmentalists warned about the intense pollution that shrouded Beijing.

But, once the competition began, the focus shifted to the athletes. Beijing’s calculation is, no doubt, that the same thing will happen this year. “Right now, the political and investigative journalists have the front page, but once the Games start, it will be the sports journalists,” Brownell said.

### **Covid and control**

Covid has conveniently spared Beijing any worries about protests from the stands, which would have been the most likely arena for political activism in a country where public demonstrations by citizens are in effect banned.

Competitors and the few other foreigners given permission to come to Beijing, including coaches, support staff and journalists, will fly into a sealed-off Olympic world, a “closed loop” of venues and hotels in just three locations, connected by their own transport vehicles, travelling in their own lanes.

It is staffed by Chinese workers who are not allowed to return to their own homes without a long period of quarantine.

Authorities are so bent on total separation that they have warned Beijing residents against helping Olympians if a loop vehicle crashes.

For Victor Cha, senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, these rules seem like a metaphor for how China’s communist leadership wants the Games to play out overall – in a closed system fully under their control.

“Covid has really given them the excuse to completely lock down everything. They want to have complete control over the picture of the Olympics and that helps,” he said.

There will be an official international protest, in the form of a diplomatic boycott by western governments including the US and the UK, but their absence is unlikely to be a major headache for officials in Beijing, or feature prominently in news coverage through the Games.

“They shrug off the diplomatic boycotts. It feeds the domestic narrative that the west is trying to steal China’s moment in sun, and they can say leaders are not coming anyway because of Covid.”

### **Athlete pressure**

The shutdown of international participation in the Games has put particular political pressure on the athletes, now the only people with a platform to make a statement.

“It is impossible to separate sports from business and politics. More than a big sporting occasion, this is also a political event,” said Mark Dreyer, author of *Sporting Superpower: An Insider’s View on China’s Quest to Be the Best*.

The human cost of China’s political controls has been thrown into the spotlight in a very personal way for athletes by the treatment of one of the country’s best-known, most successful Olympians, tennis star Peng Shuai.

Last year, she vanished from public view after accusing a former senior Communist party official of coercing her into a sexual relationship, and her allegations were scrubbed from the internet.

After international outrage, she made a series of stage-managed public appearances inside China, including with Olympic officials, which have done little to assuage concern about whether she is acting with free will.

Her treatment was highlighted by protesters at this month’s Australian Open, who wore T-shirts saying simply “Where is Peng Shuai?”. Organisers banned them, then backtracked on the ban.

Perhaps concerned by the swell of support for Peng, China has taken the unusual step of going beyond the International Olympic Committee bans on athletes taking political stands.

If they break Chinese laws, with “behaviour or speech that is against the Olympic spirit”, athletes will face “certain punishment”, Yang Shu, a member of the Beijing Organising Committee, told a news conference this month. This rhetoric may be intended mostly as deterrent, analysts say. An athlete’s arrest over a political protest would be shocking, and likely to become an enduring image of an event that Beijing wants remembered as a sporting and logistical triumph.

Rob Koehler of Global Athlete, an advocacy group for sportspeople, said they have reluctantly advised competitors to save protests or criticism of China for when they have finished competing and returned home. “That is the hardest and most outrageous thing we have had to say, given how hard we pushed for them to have the right to basic freedom of expression,” he said.

### **Omicron disruption**

Even if China manages to side-step an inflammatory protest – or an inflammatory response – at the Games, the virus that might once have looked like a gift to a government bent on control has become more of a threat to a successful Olympics, with the highly contagious Omicron circulating widely.

If an outbreak knocks out high-profile athletes, or significantly diminishes the number of competitors, it could start to undermine the events.

Beijing announced on Saturday that, even before the Games had begun, the number of cases in the Olympic village had jumped from two to 19. Cases among athletes and team officials exceeded those among media and “other stakeholders” for the first time. There has already been disruption to qualifying competitions after athletes tested positive. At the US figure skating championships, Brownell said some athletes developed Covid between competitions, and despite taking extreme precautions.

“They had been masking, observing social distancing; the pairs team had only private lessons in the rink with their coach and didn’t know where they had got it. It created quite a panic at the championships themselves,” Brownell said.

Ironically, China’s success with controlling earlier variants of Covid has left it particularly vulnerable, public health experts say. Its domestic vaccines are ineffective against Omicron, and because there have still been only a few cases in a country of more than 1.4 billion people, there is almost no natural immunity.

A vulnerable population and an unevenly distributed healthcare system makes the potential of a Covid outbreak terrifying. The devastation that ripped through Wuhan in the earliest days of the pandemic could still be unleashed on the rest of China, and fear of this has almost certainly contributed to the intense testing and quarantine rules.

### **Beyond China**

These factors have affected how the rest of the world, or at least audiences in markets such as the US, will experience the Games. The broadcaster NBC is keeping its commentators at home, covering Beijing from thousands of miles away.

Restrictions on media coverage of the last Games, the Summer Olympics in Japan held last year after a year's delay, diminished the viewing experience for many of the millions of people who wanted to follow from home.

"My personal feeling was that coverage of the Tokyo Games really lost something. It was pretty clear they didn't invest the same amount of money, the coverage was not as glossy and aesthetically pleasing," said Brownell.

"Now, with commentators not actually being in Beijing, that's going to be even more marked. I think the pandemic restrictions could have an impact on how the TV and social media audiences see these Olympics."

There may also be less promotion. In a sign perhaps of how these Olympics are among the most controversial in recent decades, sponsors who pay eye-watering sums to be connected with the Games have not been flaunting those links in the west as they have done in the run-up to previous iterations of the competition.

For years China has forced heavy penalties on sports personalities, companies and managers who risked the slightest public criticism of its politics.

A 2019 tweet by Daryl Morey, then general manager of the Houston Rockets, supporting pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong was estimated to have cost the National Basketball Association hundreds of millions of dollars after he was allowed to stay in his job.

But sponsors in the west are wary of being accused of pandering to China. Perhaps because they are caught between Beijing and Washington, there has been no pre-Games campaign to spur excitement in the US from the card payment giant Visa, Coca-Cola or Procter & Gamble, the Wall Street Journal reported.

### **One game, two worlds**

The framing in China of the Beijing Winter Games, however, is drastically different from that outside the country – focused on igniting national pride, and using the Games to boost participation in sport and expand the domestic winter sports industry.

Chinese citizens' participation in sport has been on the rise since the 2008 Games, said Shushu Chen, a lecturer in sport policy and management at the University of Birmingham, who has been tracking the impact of the Summer Games in Beijing and London.

Chen noted that compared with London, residents in Beijing were "ostensibly more positive about the inspirational effects of the Olympic Games, which can perhaps be explained by sociocultural contextual differences between the two cases".

Dreyer, who has lived in Beijing since 2007, observed that the wave of enthusiasm in China for winter sports began in 2015, when the country won the hosting rights. "China will not top the medals table this year, but it will probably do better than it has ever done before. And it will have many more athletes competing in the Winter Games than previously."

	Inside China, the Games are already being hailed as a triumph for Beijing and its ability to rally against the virus, and against western criticism. Internationally, these Games may be remembered very differently.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Ukraine urges West: be vigilant, firm</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/ukraine-urges-west-to-be-vigilant-and-firm-in-russia-talks">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/ukraine-urges-west-to-be-vigilant-and-firm-in-russia-talks</a>
GIST	<p>Kyiv has urged the west to remain “vigilant and firm” in its talks with Russia, as <a href="#">Joe Biden</a> announced a small troop deployment to eastern Europe amid fears Moscow could invade Ukraine.</p> <p>Washington’s top defence officials warned on Friday that the Kremlin had massed enough troops and hardware at the border to threaten the whole of <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, but called for further diplomatic efforts to avert a “horrific” conflict.</p> <p>Western leaders are scrambling to defuse the crisis by reaching out to the Russian president, <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a>, while trying to keep the pressure up by vowing unprecedented sanctions should he send in his forces.</p> <p>As the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, on Friday urged his western partners to avoid stirring “panic” over the massive Russian troop buildup, Putin and the French president, <a href="#">Emmanuel Macron</a>, agreed on the need for de-escalation.</p> <p>According to a Macron aide, Putin told the French leader in a call lasting more than an hour that he had “no offensive plans”.</p> <p>In Washington, Biden said he would nevertheless soon send a small number of US troops to bolster the Nato presence in eastern <a href="#">Europe</a> as tensions remain heightened.</p> <p>The US already has tens of thousands of troops stationed across mostly western Europe.</p> <p>France said on Saturday that it was planning to send hundreds of troops to Romania, an eastern Nato ally, as part of a deployment first touted by Macron earlier this month.</p> <p>Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, on Saturday issued a call for the west to remain “vigilant and firm in contacts with the Russian side” in a conversation with his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian.</p> <p>The talks underlined the need to “refrain from steps that could fuel anxiety” in Ukrainian society and “undermine the financial stability” of the post-Soviet country, a Ukrainian statement said.</p> <p>Le Drian is expected to visit Ukraine with his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock on 7 and 8 February as part of a flurry of diplomacy.</p> <p>Boris Johnson is expected to speak with Putin before heading to the region and adding to the chorus of western leaders urging him to back down.</p> <p>The Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, is due in Kyiv on Tuesday to meet the president and prime minister.</p> <p>On Saturday, Ireland’s foreign affairs minister said Russia is to move its planned military drills outside Ireland’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Simon Coveney said he has received assurances from his Russian counterpart that the drills will not take place off the south-west coast of Ireland.</p> <p>He tweeted: “This week I wrote to my counterpart, the Minister of Defence of Russia, to request a reconsideration of naval exercises off the Irish coast. This evening I received a letter confirming the Russian exercises will be relocated outside of Ireland’s EEZ. I welcome this response.”</p>

The Russian ambassador to Ireland, Yury Filatov, said: “In response to the requests from the Irish government as well as from the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation, the minister of defence of the Russian Federation, Sergey Shoigu, has made a decision.

“As a gesture of goodwill, to relocate the exercises by the Russian Navy, planned for 3 to 8 February, outside the Irish exclusive economic zone, with the aim not to hinder fishing activities by the Irish vessels in the traditional fishing areas.”

Since October, Russia has amassed more than 100,000 combat troops and equipment, as well as support forces, along its frontier with Ukraine and more recently in Belarus, which borders Ukraine on the north.

Western officials say Russia has also mustered more air and sea assets in the region, creating a complex threat unseen since the cold war.

Moscow has demanded wide-ranging security guarantees, including that Ukraine is never allowed to join Nato. The west has rejected Russia’s key demands such as stopping new members joining the alliance, but has laid down a series of areas where it sees room to negotiate with the Kremlin.

To Macron, Putin made clear that the written responses from the west to his demands this week had fallen short of Russia’s expectations, the Kremlin said. “The US and Nato responses did not take into account Russia’s fundamental concerns including preventing Nato’s expansion,” Putin said, according to the Kremlin’s readout of the call.

He added that the west had ignored the “key question” that no country should strengthen its security at the expense of others, adding Russia would “carefully study” the responses, “after which it will decide on further actions”.

Russia has also demanded a pullback of Nato forces deployed to eastern European and ex-Soviet countries that joined the alliance after the cold war. Ukraine has turned increasingly to the west since Moscow seized the Crimea peninsula in 2014 and began fuelling a separatist conflict in the east of the country that has cost more than 13,000 lives.

In the face of Russia’s latest buildup, some western allies – led by the US – have stepped up deliveries of arms to Kyiv that could be used to ward off an attack. On Friday, Ukrainian soldiers dressed in winter camouflage at a snowbound range in the far west of the country test fired new “tank killer” missiles sent by Britain.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 UK ready commit extra forces NATO allies</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/uk-ready-to-commit-extra-forces-to-nato-allies-as-russia-tension-mounts">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/uk-ready-to-commit-extra-forces-to-nato-allies-as-russia-tension-mounts</a>
GIST	<p>The UK has offered to deploy land, air and sea forces to bolster the defence of Nato countries on their northern and eastern borders as tensions over Russia’s military ambitions in <a href="#">Ukraine</a> deepen.</p> <p>Boris Johnson is expected to speak to the Russian leader Vladimir Putin this week, and travel to the region, despite intense domestic pressure over a possible leadership challenge in the wake of the “partygate” scandal.</p> <p>Johnson said the extra resources were a sign of Britain’s commitment to its Nordic and Baltic allies, and come after the US president, Joe Biden, promised on Friday to send <a href="#">a small number of American troops</a> to eastern European and Nato countries “in the near term”.</p> <p>The decision aimed to “send a clear message to the Kremlin”, Johnson said in a statement. “We will not tolerate their destabilising activity, and we will always stand with our <a href="#">Nato</a> allies in the face of Russian hostility.”</p>

	<p>The deployments included sending two warships to the Black Sea, increasing troop numbers and supplying rocket systems in Estonia, on the Russian border, and deploying fast jets to patrol Romanian and Bulgarian airspace from a base in Cyprus, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said.</p> <p>UK officials will travel to Brussels to finalise details of the military support this week. Johnson asked defence and security chiefs to step up efforts in <a href="#">Europe</a>, and told his foreign and defence secretaries to travel to Moscow to meet their Russian counterparts.</p> <p>In the UK, chief of defence staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin will on Tuesday brief the cabinet on the Ukrainian crisis.</p> <p>Top US officials on Friday urged a focus on diplomacy while saying that Russia now had enough troops and equipment in place to threaten the whole of Ukraine. Mark Milley, the top US general, warned that a Russian invasion would be “horrific” for both sides, and “result in a significant amount of casualties”.</p> <p>Both the US and UK have withdrawn staff and families from embassies in Kyiv, and British travel advice now warns against all but essential travel to the country.</p> <p>The Foreign Office is also <a href="#">expected to announce tougher sanctions on Monday</a>, meaning the UK can target Russia’s strategic and financial interests – despite reported US worries over the extent of “dirty” Russian money in London.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Covid hospitalizations retreat as deaths rise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-covid-19-hospitalizations-retreat-but-deaths-keep-rising-11643536011?mod=hp_lead_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-covid-19-hospitalizations-retreat-but-deaths-keep-rising-11643536011?mod=hp_lead_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>Hospitalizations for Covid-19 continue to slow in the U.S., with the seven-day average of hospital patients with confirmed or suspected infections dropping to 146,769 on Saturday, about 8% down from a peak on Jan. 20, according to data from the Department of Health and Human Services.</p> <p>The rolling seven-day average of daily deaths with Covid-19, a lagging indicator, continues to rise, however, reaching 2,379 on Friday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Covid-19 deaths in the U.S. are running at their highest level since February last year. Even though the evidence suggests the highly contagious Omicron variant of the virus is less likely to cause severe illness and death than previous variants, the sheer number of Omicron infections is leading to a heavy toll.</p> <p>The gradual decline in hospitalizations is making health experts cautiously optimistic that the current wave of Omicron may have peaked, and that deaths might trend downward in the coming weeks too. However, while the Omicron tide appears to be receding in heavily populated coastal states such as California and New York, epidemiologists warn that it hasn’t yet peaked in some less-vaccinated parts of the U.S.</p> <p>In the Europe Union, average Covid-19 deaths are oscillating at around 1,700 a day, down from a peak of over 2,000 daily deaths in mid-December.</p> <p>Italy currently has the highest daily deaths from the virus among major Western European countries, averaging more than 360 a day in the past week. Omicron reached Italy relatively late, after first sweeping through northern European countries such as Germany and the U.K. Covid-19 deaths continue to rise in France and Spain.</p> <p>The unvaccinated minority of Western Europe’s population continue to account for the bulk of severely ill people and patients in intensive care, prompting many countries in the region to tighten social-distancing restrictions for the unvaccinated, while seeking to maintain a semblance of daily normality for those who are fully inoculated.</p>



	<p>The policy has angered many unvaccinated people and fueled street protests in several countries against the mounting restrictions that they face on entering workplaces, restaurants, means of transportation and other public spaces. But the approach has broad public support in most of Europe among the vaccinated majority, who oppose the reintroduction of universal social-distancing restrictions to deal with the winter wave of Omicron.</p> <p>In China, which has tried to maintain a policy of suppressing Covid-19 within its borders, repeated outbreaks of the virus and the government's strict measures to stamp them out are taking a toll on the economy, disrupting both factory output and consumer activity, economic surveys released on Sunday showed. The global spread of the Omicron variant is also hurting overseas consumer demand for Chinese exports, the data suggested.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 More migrants seek asylum thru Canada</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/immigration-coronavirus-pandemic-health-canada-new-york-10c091a9b16ee5a696804c4c6c5ce42d">https://apnews.com/article/immigration-coronavirus-pandemic-health-canada-new-york-10c091a9b16ee5a696804c4c6c5ce42d</a>
GIST	<p>CHAMPLAIN, N.Y. (AP) — Whenever a bus arrives at the Greyhound station in Plattsburgh, New York, a small band of taxi drivers waits to drive passengers on a half-hour trip to a snowy, dead-end road that turns to dirt near the Canadian border.</p> <p>There, at the border, refugees pile out of taxis or vans several times a day, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers warn that they will be arrested for illegal entry if they cross, which they do. Most are soon released to pursue asylum, living and working freely while awaiting a decision.</p> <p>“We have the hopes of everyone — be successful and have a change of life,” Alejandro Cortez, a 25-year-old Colombian man, said as he exited a taxi last week at the end of Roxham Road in Champlain, New York. The town of about 6,000 is directly across the border from Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec.</p> <p>Cortez joins a renewed stream of migrants seeking refuge in Canada after a 20-month ban on asylum requests designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Families are once again lugging suitcases and carrying children across a remote, snow-covered ditch to the border.</p> <p>Canada's decision to lift the ban on Nov. 21 stands in marked contrast to the approach in the United States, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has extended indefinitely a similar restriction <a href="#">on the border with Mexico</a> that will enter its third year in March.</p> <p>On Wednesday, a Justice Department attorney vigorously defended the ban against sharp questioning from federal appeals court judges about the scientific basis for such a far-reaching move against asylum.</p> <p>The U.S. expelled migrants nearly 1.5 million times from March 2020 through November under what is known as Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law that <a href="#">the Trump and Biden administrations</a> have used to <a href="#">deny migrants a chance to seek asylum</a> on grounds that it will curb the spread of the coronavirus. That accounts for about two of three arrests or expulsions at the border, most involving single adults and some families. Unaccompanied children have been exempt under President Joe Biden.</p> <p>Fully vaccinated travelers have been able to enter the U.S. and Canada <a href="#">since November</a>, but Canada went a step farther by reinstating a path to asylum.</p> <p>Cortez arrived in the United States on a tourist visa five months ago. He said he couldn't go back to Colombia because of violence and the disappearance of thousands of young men.</p> <p>“All of that hurts a lot,” he said. “We have to run from our country.”</p> <p>Asylum-seekers on the Canadian border began appearing at Roxham Road around the time Trump became president. How it became the favored place to cross into Canada isn't clear, but the migrants are taking</p>

advantage of a quirk in a 2002 agreement between the U.S. and Canada that says people seeking asylum must apply in the first country they arrive in.

Migrants who go to an official crossing — like the one where Interstate 87 ends just east of Roxham Road — are returned to the United States and told to apply there. But those who arrive in Canada at a location other than a port of entry, like Roxham Road, are allowed to stay and request protection.

Nearly 60,000 people sought asylum after illegally crossing the border into Canada from February 2017 through September, many at Roxham Road, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Montreal, Canadian government [statistics](#) show.

Of those, more than 45,000 claims have been finalized, with almost 24,300 approved, or almost 54%. Another 17,000 claims were rejected while over 14,000 are still pending. Other claims were abandoned or withdrawn.

In December, the number of asylum-seekers at the border in Quebec jumped to nearly 2,800. That's up from 832 in November and 96 in October, according to the [statistics](#).

Canada lifted the asylum ban with little fanfare or public backlash, perhaps because the numbers are small compared with people crossing into the U.S. from Mexico.

[Biden's decision](#) to keep the Trump-era ban in place has [come under scathing criticism](#) from the United Nations refugee agency, legal scholars and advocates.

Under the ban, people from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, are bounced back to Mexico before being afforded rights under U.S. and international law to seek asylum. People from other countries are flown home without a chance at asylum.

Scientific arguments for Title 42 have met with skepticism from the start.

The Associated Press [reported in 2020](#) that Vice President Mike Pence called CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield in March of that year and told him to use the agency's special legal authority to slash the number of asylum-seekers allowed into the country.

Pence [made the request](#) after a top agency doctor who oversees such orders refused to comply with the directive, saying there was no valid public health reason to issue it.

Dr. Anne Schuchat, the second-highest CDC official when she departed in May, told a congressional panel last year that “the bulk of the evidence at that time did not support this policy proposal.”

On Wednesday, Justice Department attorney Sharon Swingle insisted the ban is based on scientific expertise and prevents disease at crowded Border Patrol holding facilities. Facing persistent questioning from judges on a three-member panel in Washington, she acknowledged there were no affidavits in court records to explain the order's scientific foundation.

Within hours of the November change by the Canadian government, immigrants started arriving in large numbers at Roxham Road, said Janet McFetridge, of [Plattsburg Cares](#), a group that provides hats, mittens and scarves to people crossing the border in the dead of winter. She said people are eager to cross while they can.

“There definitely is a fear that it's going to close suddenly,” she said while waiting on Roxham Road for the next group of migrants.

A Canadian officer said in French to a woman and her traveling companion, who was carrying a baby, that it was illegal to enter Canada there.

	<p>“If you cross here, you will be arrested,” he said.</p> <p>“Yes, it’s not a problem. It’s not a problem,” the woman said as her companion started to pull a suitcase across the border.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Govts revenue rebound after pandemic loss</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-pandemics-personal-taxes-42637f997178a1de4911bf16dbc3f60b">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-pandemics-personal-taxes-42637f997178a1de4911bf16dbc3f60b</a>
GIST	<p>State and local governments lost at least \$117 billion of expected revenue early in the pandemic, according to an Associated Press analysis, but many are now awash in record amounts of money, boosted partly by federal aid.</p> <p>In response to the dramatic turnaround, governors, lawmakers and local officials have proposed a surge in spending as well as a new wave of tax cuts.</p> <p>“The ultimate effect of the pandemic was a net positive,” said Stephen Parker, assistant city manager for the Los Angeles suburb of Upland, where sales tax revenues are soaring. “Isn’t that unbelievable? It’s just crazy to think of that.”</p> <p>Upland, a city of 79,000, was representative of many cities at the outset of the pandemic. It reported an estimated loss of nearly \$6.1 million in 2020 — the result of a steep but short-lived national recession and what Parker describes as a “generous” Treasury Department method for calculating losses. That figure was the median amount among more than 900 cities that reported their revenues to the department under the American Rescue Plan Act.</p> <p>Upland’s financial situation turned around even before the end of 2020, Parker said. Federal COVID-19 stimulus checks played a role. So did a shift in consumer spending to goods instead of services. That lifted city revenues, Parker said, because services often are exempt from sales taxes, while goods are not.</p> <p>The pandemic relief law championed by Democrats and signed by President Joe Biden last March included \$350 billion in aid to states and local governments. The Treasury Department required states, counties and larger cities to file reports last year detailing their initial plans for the money. Those governments also were asked to estimate their losses for 2020 by comparing actual revenue to expected revenue under a Treasury formula.</p> <p>Though revenue figures were left blank by nearly one-quarter of the roughly 3,700 governments that filed reports, the data nonetheless provides the most comprehensive picture yet of the financial strain on governments during the pandemic’s first year.</p> <p>More than two-thirds of state and local governments reported at least some losses, ranging from a few thousand dollars in some rural counties to more than \$12 billion for the state of Texas, according to the AP’s analysis. The total was \$117.5 billion.</p> <p>The Treasury Department last October declined an AP request to release the revenue-loss data under the federal Freedom of Information Act, saying it would be publicly available later. It recently <a href="#">posted the data on its website</a>. The next reports are due Monday for some governments and April 30 for others.</p> <p>The department used lost revenue to determine how much flexibility to give governments in spending the aid. Under guidelines issued last May, governments that showed a loss were free to spend an equal amount on almost any government services, including roads and other projects not otherwise allowed under the rules.</p> <p><a href="#">A final rule released earlier this month</a> expanded that flexibility by allowing governments to claim up to \$10 million of revenue losses, even if actual losses were less.</p>

Upland, which is getting \$15 million, plans to use part of its flexible spending to repave parking lots and repair hundreds of sections of sidewalks that might not otherwise have been eligible.

Federal assistance was not the only factor that helped governments bounce back.

Financial analysts also cite inflation, which pushed up prices and bolstered sales tax collections. Many consumers also had more to spend because of the stimulus checks. A strong stock market drove up capital gains taxes. And an early pandemic rise in unemployment spared many higher earners, who shifted to working from home while continuing to pay income taxes.

In many places, the revenue rebound exceeded pre-pandemic levels. Total state tax revenues from last April through November rose 20% compared to the same period in 2019, [according to an Urban Institute report](#) released earlier this month.

For governments that already were financially strained, the pandemic deepened their losses but also resulted in a cash windfall.

The Hudson River Valley city of Poughkeepsie was rated by the New York comptroller as the state's most financially stressed community in 2020. With a pre-pandemic deficit around \$7 million and no reserves, the city quickly cut spending, sold property, froze hiring and instituted an early retirement program "in a desperate effort to close the gap" when the pandemic began, City Administrator Marc Nelson said.

The city reported a 2020 revenue loss of nearly \$4.5 million under the Treasury Department's formula. It's getting more than \$20 million from the American Rescue Plan. Though the relief money cannot be used to wipe out the deficit, the city plans to make major improvements to parks and swimming pools, including a complete rebuild of a run-down bathhouse that has been relying on portable toilets.

"These are things that would not have been within the city's ability to take on were it not for the COVID relief money," Nelson said.

Though they're spending the federal aid, some Republican officials insist it was unnecessary in light of the rapidly rebounding tax revenues.

Missouri reported an estimated \$900 million loss for 2020 but ended its 2021 fiscal year with a record cash balance. Republican Gov. Mike Parson recently proposed a \$47 billion budget that is up nearly one-third over the current year because of surging federal and state revenues. He wants to spend more on infrastructure and public employee salaries while also saving more.

"When other states will be using federal dollars to fill spending gaps and budget shortfalls, we will be making investments in the future," he said in his State of the State address.

In some cases, government losses weren't as severe as the Treasury numbers might suggest.

Greer County in rural southwest Oklahoma reported a 2020 revenue loss of \$363,630 — around the national median for counties reporting their revenues. That comprised 10% of the county's expected revenue under the Treasury Department formula, but it didn't prompt budget cuts, County Clerk Tiffany Buchanan said.

"The county didn't feel that much of a loss," Buchanan said, explaining: "We live on a very tight, strict budget as it is."

The county plans to use some of its \$1.1 million from the American Rescue Plan to help fund the sheriff's office and pay emergency medical personnel.

	<p>Some states, including California and Texas, projected large revenue losses at the outset of the pandemic but have since posted big gains.</p> <p>When it passed a budget early in the pandemic, California had expected the recession to cause a \$54 billion deficit. That led officials to defer payments to schools and community colleges and to reduce state employee pay, according to the state's Treasury report.</p> <p>Now California is projecting a nearly \$46 billion surplus spurred by record tax collections, leaving officials searching for ways to use the money. <a href="#">Gov. Gavin Newsom recently proposed a budget</a> that would expand health coverage to all low-income adults living in the state illegally while simultaneously cutting taxes. The Democratic governor also said a substantial tax rebate was likely in order.</p> <p>"I will be holding the governor's feet to the fire and keep him at his word to refund surplus dollars to the taxpayers," GOP state Sen. Melissa Melendez said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 JBLM troops heightened deployment status</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/military/article257844183.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/military/article257844183.html</a>
GIST	<p>Troops at Joint Base Lewis-McChord were placed on a heightened deployment status Friday by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin should Russia invade Ukraine.</p> <p>"This action is a heightened readiness status prescribing the numbers of days a unit has to be ready to deploy if ordered to do so," said JBLM public information officer Bud McKay on Saturday. "It is not a deployment order."</p> <p>JBLM is one of several military installations with an increased readiness posture. Others include Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Polk, Louisiana; Robins Air Force Base, Georgia; Fort Stewart, Georgia; Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio and others, according to Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby.</p> <p>Austin placed several units on a higher and more imminent readiness level. Those in the "Prepare to Deploy" group include elements of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 18th Airborne Corps, both based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.</p> <p>"Additionally, from Fort Campbell, elements of the 101st Airborne Division; and from Fort Carson, Colorado, elements of the Fourth Infantry Division have also been placed on increased readiness," Kirby said.</p> <p>In total, Austin placed 8,500 U.S. military troops from bases across the nation on a heightened level of preparedness to deploy. They include medical, aviation and logistics support and combat formations.</p> <p>Kirby also said the Defense Department has paused processing civilian vaccination exemption requests and disciplinary actions for failure to become vaccinated for federal civilian workers.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Russia daily Covid cases hit all-time high</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-russia-pandemics-68088e45ddb1c674147b47cbd1da3bcd">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-russia-pandemics-68088e45ddb1c674147b47cbd1da3bcd</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — The daily count of new coronavirus infections in Russia spiked above 110,000 on Saturday as the highly contagious omicron variant races through the vast country.</p> <p>The state coronavirus task force reported 113,122 new infections over the past 24 hours — an all-time high and a sevenfold increase from early in the month, when daily case counts were about 15,000. The</p>

task force said 668 people died of COVID-19 in the past day, bring Russia's total fatality count for the pandemic to 330,111, by far the deadliest toll in Europe.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Friday that "it is obvious that this number is higher and possibly much higher," because "many people don't get tested" or have no symptoms.

The Kremlin spokesman also admitted that a lot of people in the presidential administration have gotten infected with the virus. "The vast majority continue to work from home after having isolated themselves," Peskov said. "This explosive contagiousness of the omicron, it demonstrates itself in full."

Despite the surging infections, authorities have avoided imposing any major restrictions to stem the surge, saying the health system has been coping with the influx of patients.

Earlier this month, parliament indefinitely postponed introducing restrictions on the unvaccinated that would have proven unpopular among vaccine-hesitant Russians. And this week health officials cut the required isolation period for those who came in contact with COVID-19 patients from 14 days to seven without offering any explanation for the move.

Russia has had only one national lockdown, in 2020, although many Russians were ordered to stay off work for a week last October amid a jump in reported cases and deaths.

Russia's state statistics agency, which uses broader counting criteria than the task force, puts the country's pandemic death toll much higher, saying the number of virus-linked deaths between April 2020 and October 2021 was over 625,000.

Just about half of Russia's 146 million people have been fully vaccinated, even though Russia boasted about being the first country in the world to approve and roll out a domestically developed coronavirus vaccine.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Russian roar hollow to Latin American allies
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-caribbean-moscow-4c5c1a7ee35198415532f6ca12cd40e3">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-caribbean-moscow-4c5c1a7ee35198415532f6ca12cd40e3</a>
GIST	<p>MIAMI (AP) — It was a classic Russian power play with echoes of Cold War gamesmanship.</p> <p>Shortly after entering into service in 2019, <a href="#">Russia's most advanced warship</a> made a goodwill tour of the Caribbean, armed with cruise missiles, air defense systems and other weapons.</p> <p>But when the Admiral Gorshkov sailed into the port of Havana, it was closely tailed by a Russian rescue tugboat — a sign to many that Moscow doubted the vessel's reliability and the visit was nothing more than a feeble effort to project power.</p> <p>Russia is once again rattling its saber <a href="#">amid rising tensions over Ukraine</a>, hinting that the U.S. refusal to heed its demands could spur closer military cooperation with allies in Latin America. In recent days, several senior Russian officials have warned Moscow could <a href="#">deploy troops or military assets to</a> Cuba and Venezuela if the U.S. and NATO insist on meddling on Russia's doorstep.</p> <p>U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan quickly dismissed Russia's tit-for-tat threats. On the heels of its massive troop buildup on its border with Ukraine, Russia's ability to mobilize troops in the Western Hemisphere, thousands of miles away, is limited at best, experts contend.</p> <p>"This is pure misdirection and it's not fooling anyone," said Kevin Whitaker, a former U.S. ambassador to Colombia who also served as a diplomat in Venezuela, Nicaragua and as head of the Office of Cuban Affairs in Washington. "It's not real power projection. It's a showpiece and nothing more."</p>



But even if talk of troop deployments is mostly bluster, Russia's strategic buildup in Latin America is real, posing national security threats in what generations of U.S. policy makers have referred to as "Washington's backyard."

In the past decade, as the U.S. influence in the region has waned, Moscow — and to a lesser extent other far-flung adversaries like China and Iran — have quietly cemented ties with authoritarian governments in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela through a mix of weapons sales, financing deals and intense diplomatic engagement.

Moscow helped Venezuela design a cryptocurrency, forgave a \$35 billion Cuba debt and runs a high-tech anti-narcotics compound in Nicaragua that many believe is a covert beachhead for spying across the region.

Time and again, Russia has shown a willingness to leverage its sizable military whenever it has felt threatened by the U.S.

In 2008, Moscow sent a pair of Tu-160 [nuclear-capable bombers](#) to Venezuela amid tensions with the U.S. over Russia's brief war with Georgia, a deployment followed that year by the arrival of the "Peter the Great" warship.

Russia sent more Tu-160s in 2018 as relations with the West plunged to post-Cold War lows over Ukraine, and the military even hinted it was considering setting up an air base on tiny La Orchilla Island, so small that landing military aircraft there would have been nearly impossible.

Even in countries friendlier to the U.S., like Mexico and Colombia, Russia has been accused of spying or engaging in disinformation campaigns to shape elections. A senior Colombian military official recently traveled to Washington to brief U.S. officials on Russian attempts to penetrate the communications of the country's top military command, a person familiar with the visit told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive issue.

On social media, the Spanish-language arm of the Russian state-controlled RT television network has more than 18 million followers on Facebook, 10 times as many as the Spanish-language affiliate of Voice of America, according to the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a think tank that tracks the rise of authoritarianism around the world. It also outperforms most other Spanish-language media on the platform, though it's still dwarfed by CNN en Espanol.

It's all a far cry from the height of the Cold War, when Nikita Khrushchev in 1962 briefly placed nuclear missiles in Cuba, the Kremlin maintained a listening post less than 100 miles from Florida and the Sandinista government that was fighting a U.S.-backed right-wing insurgency in Nicaragua was building an air base to accommodate Soviet fighter jets.

Nicaragua's Punta Huete airfield is today semi-abandoned and President Vladimir Putin closed the spy station in Cuba two decades ago. With the collapse of its communist sponsor in the early 1990s, Cuba spiraled into a depression marked by widespread hunger known as the "Special Period."

But Russia's more limited support has bought it friends. Recently Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega named a consul in the Crimean peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. It's also allowed Putin to restore some of Russia's former glory in a region that has long resented Washington's far longer history of meddling.

As Putin now looks to repel NATO from what he calls Russia's "near abroad" in Ukraine, he's likely to take at least a symbolic poke at the U.S. in its own sphere of influence, said Evan Ellis, a researcher at the U.S. Army War College who specializes in Russian and Chinese influence in Latin America.



“I’m sure Putin will do something to project toughness on the cheap as he always does,” Ellis said. “But he’s not going to do anything that costs him a lot of money or get him into deeper trouble down the line like deploying nukes. He knows there are limits.”

Russia’s closest ally is Venezuela, which has spent billions over the past two decades of socialist rule building up its air defense with Russia’s help — everything from Sukhoi fighter jets and attack helicopters to sophisticated radar and shoulder-mounted rocket launchers.

Such an arsenal gives Nicolás Maduro an ability to inflict serious damage in the event of any conflict with neighboring Colombia, the top U.S. ally in the region, said Gen. Manuel Cristopher Figuera, who was the Venezuelan president’s spy chief until [fleeing to the U.S. in 2019](#) after a failed putsch against his former boss.

“It’s not an ideological relationship. It’s a commercial one, but it provides Maduro with a certain amount of protection,” said Figuera, who received training in Cuba and from Putin ally Belarus.

As the U.S. and its allies have taken steps to isolate the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela — what Donald Trump’s former national security adviser John Bolton called the “troika of tyranny”— Putin has tried to fill the void.

In recent days, he’s spoken to Maduro, Ortega and Cuba’s Miguel Díaz Canel to explore ways to deepen strategic cooperation. He’s also sent a planeload of medical supplies to Cuba to help it fight the coronavirus pandemic.

But the leaders, although expressing gratitude for Russia’s continued aid, have so far remained silent on Ukraine — a sign they may be reluctant to be drawn into another geopolitical tussle.

“One of the fundamental legacies for Latin America from the Cold War is that they don’t want to be treated as a pawn in someone else’s game,” said Whitaker, the former ambassador to Colombia. “What Russia is doing shows enormous disrespect for the sovereignty of governments that are supposedly their allies.”

It’s something even Putin loyalists are starting to acknowledge.

“Cuba and Venezuela are the countries that are close to us, they are our partners,” Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia’s Security Council, said in an interview with Russian media.

“But we can’t just deploy things there,” added Medvedev, who served as Russian president in 2008-2012 when Putin had to shift into the premier’s post because of term limits. “There can’t be any talk about setting up a base there as happened during the Soviet times.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Cameroon stadium deaths to ticketless fans</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-soccer-sports-health-cameroon-0448acb12912bd1657cead5441bf0fc3">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-soccer-sports-health-cameroon-0448acb12912bd1657cead5441bf0fc3</a>
GIST	<p>YAOUNDE, Cameroon (AP) — Cameroon authorities have blamed a deadly stadium crush at the African Cup of Nations soccer tournament on a “massive” influx of ticketless fans who arrived late to a game involving the host team and tried to force their way in to avoid security checks and COVID-19 screening.</p> <p>In response, the government ordered 250 extra police officers for Cameroon’s next game, a quarterfinal against Gambia on Saturday at a different stadium. <a href="#">Cameroon won the game 2-0</a> with security visibly heightened both inside and outside the stadium.</p>

[The stampede at Monday's Cameroon-Comoros last 16 match](#) at the African Cup's main Olembe Stadium in the capital of Yaounde left eight people dead and another 38 injured, seven of them seriously. It was one of the worst stadium disasters in the history of Africa's biggest soccer tournament.

Cameroon Sports Minister Narcisse Mouelle Kombi said at a news conference on Friday that the full results of a government investigation were not yet available, but he did reveal some new information.

Close to 60,000 fans tried to get into the game at the Olembe, Kombi said, when the crowd was meant to be capped at a maximum of 48,000 people because of COVID-19 restrictions.

African Cup organizers have made it compulsory for fans to present negative virus tests and proof they are vaccinated against COVID-19 to attend games.

But many fans didn't have tickets or meet the COVID-19 screening criteria and so forced their way in, Kombi said. Local TV stations have broadcast footage of fans climbing over security fences at the time of the crush.

"I will not be able to give you the results of investigations ordered by Cameroon President Paul Biya but the massive and late influx of supporters and spectators at Yaounde's Olembe stadium caused the crush," Kombi said.

Also, the fans had arrived late because they had been watching an earlier match on TV, Kombi said.

Authorities haven't yet explained why security officials directed fans toward a gate that was locked, as witnesses have claimed and which contributed to the crush. Or why security was so inadequate and so easily overwhelmed.

Kombi is also the president of Cameroon's local organizing committee for the tournament.

He said the increased security for Cameroon's game against Gambia in the commercial capital Douala on Saturday was "to stop the uncivil behavior of Cameroonians who want to force themselves into the stadium when they do not have entry tickets and negative COVID-19 test results."

Kombi said organizers would no longer allow children under the age of 11 to attend games after a number of children were caught up in the crush at the Olembe.

The Confederation of African Football, which runs the African Cup alongside local organizers, has taken one of the quarterfinals away from the Olembe Stadium as a result of the crush. CAF president Patrice Motsepe said the Olembe also will not host a semifinal and the final on Feb. 6 unless Cameroon soccer officials can guarantee the games will be safe.

The extra police presence at the Japoma Stadium in Douala for Saturday's game was also in response to an incident at that stadium during a group game between Algeria and Ivory Coast, when around 40 fans invaded the field at the end of the match. Some of the fans grabbed hold of players and had to be dragged away.

Cameroon police chief Martin Mbarga Nguelle said he has personally overseen the security preparations for Cameroon's quarterfinal.

The Central African nation is hosting the African Cup for the first time in 50 years and its preparations have been under scrutiny. It was meant to host in 2019 but was stripped of that year's event by CAF because of problems with its stadium preparations.

CAF warned Cameroon as recently as a few months ago that the facilities and security plans at the Olembe were inadequate and threatened to take the opening game away from the 60,000-seat arena, which cost Cameroon over \$300 million to build for the African Cup.

HEADLINE	01/30 Ottawa: thousands protest Covid mandates
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-justin-trudeau-canada-45778ef0bdca45501411fb21066c46a0">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-justin-trudeau-canada-45778ef0bdca45501411fb21066c46a0</a>
GIST	<p>OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Thousands of protesters gathered in Canada’s capital on Saturday to protest vaccine mandates, masks and lockdowns.</p> <p>Some parked on the grounds of the National War Memorial and danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, others carried signs and flags with swastikas and some used the statue of Canadian hero Terry Fox to display an anti-vaccine statement, sparking widespread condemnation.</p> <p>“I am sickened to see protesters dance on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and desecrate the National War Memorial. Generations of Canadians have fought and died for our rights, including free speech, but not this. Those involved should hang their heads in shame,” tweeted Gen. Wayne Eyre, Canada’s Defense Staff chief.</p> <p>Protestors compared vaccine mandates to fascism, one truck carried a Confederate flag and many carried expletive-laden signs targeting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.</p> <p>The statue of Fox, a national hero who lost a leg to bone cancer as a youngster, then set off in 1980 on a fundraising trek across Canada, was draped with a upside down Canadian flag with a sign that said “mandate freedom.”</p> <p>Trudeau retweeted a statement from The Terry Fox Foundation that said “Terry believed in science and gave his life to help others.”</p> <p>Eric Simmons, from Oshawa, Ontario, said all vaccine mandates should be ended.</p> <p>“They’re not effective, they’re not working. It’s not changing anything. We can’t keep living like this. People are losing their jobs because they don’t want to get the vaccine,” Simmons said.</p> <p>The convoy of truckers and others prompted police to prepare for the possibility of violence and warn residents to avoid downtown. A top Parliament security official advised lawmakers to lock their doors amid reports their private homes may be targeted.</p> <p>Trudeau has said Canadians are not represented by this “very troubling, small but very vocal minority of Canadians who are lashing out at science, at government, at society, at mandates and public health advice.”</p> <p>The prime minister’s itinerary for the day usually says he is in Ottawa if he’s at home, but on Saturday it said “National Capital Region” amid a report he’s been moved to an undisclosed location. One of Trudeau’s kids has COVID-19 and the prime minister has been isolating and working remotely.</p> <p>Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and the premier of the province of Quebec who is proposing to tax the unvaccinated is popular.</p> <p>Some are, in part, protesting a new rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada be fully immunized against the coronavirus. The United States has imposed the same requirement on truckers entering that country.</p> <p>The Canadian Trucking Alliance said a great number of the protesters have no connection to the trucking industry, adding they have a separate agenda to push. The alliance notes the vast majority of drivers are vaccinated.</p>

The organizers of the protest have called for the forceful elimination of all COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates and some called for the removal of Trudeau.

The Shepherds of Good Hope, which has a soup kitchen for the homeless in Ottawa, reported staff and volunteers “experienced harassment from convoy protestors seeking meals from our soup kitchen. The individuals were given means to defuse the conflict.”

Some opposition Canadian Conservative lawmakers served coffee to the protesters. Conservative party leader Erin O’Toole met with some truckers. The protest has also attracted support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and some Fox News personalities.

“We want those great Canadian truckers to know that we are with them all the way,” Trump said at a rally in Conroe, Texas. “They are doing more to defend American freedom than our leaders by far.”

Former U.S. Ambassador to Canada Bruce Heyman said the threat against democracy isn’t only happening in America.

“Both the use of the swastika and the confederate flag are symbols of hate. So very sad to see these symbols anywhere and especially in Canada,” said Heyman, who was the U.S. envoy under former President Barack Obama.

The Parliamentary Protective Service expects as many as 10,000 protesters as part of a weekend-long rally.

“I’m locked into my own country right now,” said Tom Pappin, an unvaccinated man who came from just outside Ottawa. “I can’t go on a holiday. I can’t go to a restaurant, I can’t go bowling. I can’t go to a movie. You know, these are things that it’s just gotten out of control.”

The 52-year-old said attendees are likely to stay parked by Parliament until vaccine mandates are lifted.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Russia moves navy exercise outside Ireland</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-russia-moscow-europe-armed-forces-40a754ec84fd6278e3d7f3e7feb1c2e2">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-russia-moscow-europe-armed-forces-40a754ec84fd6278e3d7f3e7feb1c2e2</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russia says it will relocate naval exercises off the coast of Ireland after Dublin raised concerns about them amid a tense dispute with the West over expansion of the NATO alliance and fears that Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine.</p> <p>The Feb. 3-8 exercises were to be held 240 kilometers (150 miles) off southwestern Ireland — in international waters but within Ireland’s exclusive economic zone. Ireland is a member of the 27-nation European Union but not a member of NATO.</p> <p>Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney this week objected to the war games, saying “This isn’t a time to increase military activity and tension in the context of what’s happening with and in Ukraine. The fact that they are choosing to do it on the western borders, if you like, of the EU, off the Irish coast, is something that in our view is simply not welcome.”</p> <p>Russia’s embassy in Ireland on Saturday posted a letter on Facebook from Ambassador Yuriy Filatov saying the exercises would be relocated outside of the Irish economic zone “with the aim not to hinder fishing activities.”</p> <p>The decision was a rare concession amid the escalating tensions surrounding Russia’s massing of an estimated 100,000 troops near the border with Ukraine and its demands that NATO promise never to allow Ukraine to join the alliance, stop the deployment of NATO weapons near Russian borders and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.</p>

The U.S. and NATO formally rejected those demands this week, although Washington outlined areas where discussions are possible, offering hope that there could be a way to avoid war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made no public remarks about the Western response. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said it leaves little chance for reaching agreement, though he also says Russia does not want war.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Friday that Putin could use any portion of his force to seize Ukrainian cities and “significant territories” or to carry out “coercive acts or provocative political acts” like the recognition of breakaway territories inside Ukraine.

Two territories in eastern Ukraine have been under the control of Russia-backed rebels since 2014, after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine.

A Russian lawmaker is encouraging residents of those areas of Ukraine to join the Russian army, a sign that Moscow is continuing to try to integrate those territories as much as possible. Viktor Vodolatsky said Saturday that residents in rebels-held areas in eastern Ukraine fear assaults by Ukrainian forces and that those who hold Russian passports would be welcomed in the Russian military.

“If Russian citizens residing in the (territories) want to join the Russian Armed Forces, the Rostov regional military commissariat will register and draft them,” Vodolatsky, deputy chairman of parliament committee on relations with neighbors, told the state news agency Tass.

Russia has granted passports to more than 500,000 people in the rebel-held territories. Vodolatsky said the recruits would serve in Russia — but that leaves open the option that they could join any future invasion force.

A senior official in President Joe Biden’s administration said the U.S. welcomed Lavrov’s comments that Russia does not want war, “but this needs to be backed up with action. We need to see Russia pulling some of the troops that they have deployed away from the Ukrainian border and taking other de-escalatory steps.” The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk publicly.

Lavrov has said the U.S. suggested the two sides could talk about limits on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles, restrictions on military drills and rules to prevent accidents between warships and aircraft. He said the Russians proposed discussing those issues years ago, but Washington and its allies never took them up on it.

He also said those issues are secondary to Russia’s main concerns about NATO. He said international agreements say the security of one nation must not come at the expense of others, and said he would send letters to his Western counterparts asking them to explain their failure to respect that pledge.

Washington has warned Moscow of devastating sanctions if it invades Ukraine, including penalties targeting top Russian officials and key economic sectors. Lavrov said Moscow had warned Washington that sanctions would amount to a complete severing of ties.

NATO, meanwhile, said it was bolstering its deterrence in the Baltic Sea region.

Russia has launched military drills involving motorized infantry and artillery units in southwestern Russia, warplanes in Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea, and dozens of warships in the Black Sea and the Arctic. Russian troops are also in Belarus for joint drills, raising Western fears that Moscow could stage an attack on Ukraine from the north from Belarus. The Ukrainian capital is only 75 kilometers (46 miles) from the border with Belarus.

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SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/africa-congo-rebel-army-clashes-thousands-displaced-dc9170c58e730d679ca66c558b71e052">https://apnews.com/article/africa-congo-rebel-army-clashes-thousands-displaced-dc9170c58e730d679ca66c558b71e052</a>
GIST	<p>KIBUMBA, Congo (AP) — Thousands of people in Congo have been displaced after they fled ongoing clashes between the Congolese army and rebel fighters this week.</p> <p>On Tuesday, a fresh attack carried out by the March 23 Movement, or M23, targeted a Congolese army position in the territory of Rutshuru, just north of the city of Goma in eastern Congo. While authorities confirmed the attack, they did not provide details about it. Residents told The Associated Press that they saw gunfights and dead bodies.</p> <p>Since the beginning of this week, inhabitants from six villages in the country's east have fled the violence. At least 2,000 people are now living in improvised shelters, in churches, schools or with host families.</p> <p>On Friday, the AP interviewed several eyewitnesses who fled to Kibumba and found shelter in a local church.</p> <p>"The attack began in Nyesisi, Ngungu, Kanombe. When we were in the field on Wednesday, we heard bullets over the hills and we fled," Baseme Mashukano, a resident of Nyesisi, one of the six villages caught in the crossfire, said. "We abandoned everything and now we are here in Kibumba. We spend the night in the church while others sleep outside, we have nothing to eat, no food, no water or medicine."</p> <p>Another person displaced by the conflict, Sarah Kasigwa, said she lost her three children and husband amid the chaos.</p> <p>"We saw several dead people" she said. "We are sleeping here, in this school, on the ground. There is just cement, no blanket, we suffer a lot."</p> <p>Tumaini Anouarite, a 32-year-old mother of five, said that she saw soldiers firing bullets in the nearby hills, and gunfights between the army and M23 fighters.</p> <p>On Friday, U.N. forces deployed in the area.</p> <p>The M23, which also calls itself the "Revolutionary Army of Congo", is a former rebel group of Congolese backed by Rwanda and Uganda that was defeated in 2013. Since November, the movement has been accused of being behind several attacks against the army.</p> <p>The attacks took place in the vicinity of Virunga National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site, renowned for its large gorilla population.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 A year in Myanmar under military rule</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/elections-indonesia-myanmar-yangon-7cd0ee904a358cb230525ff0d8a0becd">https://apnews.com/article/elections-indonesia-myanmar-yangon-7cd0ee904a358cb230525ff0d8a0becd</a> <a href="https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-no-peace-one-year-after-military-coup-1db3ac0e7b051098cd3268b8d16dcac4">https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-no-peace-one-year-after-military-coup-1db3ac0e7b051098cd3268b8d16dcac4</a>
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — An elderly woman forced to flee bombings. A former peace negotiator leaving his job to fight Myanmar security forces. A woman's husband shot during a peaceful protest, leaving her alone to care for their two children.</p> <p>Since Myanmar's military dismissed the results of the country's democratic election and seized power on Feb. 1, 2021, peaceful nationwide protests and violent crackdowns by security forces have spiraled into a nationwide humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>The Associated Press spoke to people in Myanmar about how their lives have changed in the year since the military took power. They spoke on condition their names are not disclosed for fear of reprisal.</p>

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#### THE WIDOW: "HE SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED"

Before his death, Khine's husband earned enough money making door gates that her family lived a comfortable life in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city. She was able to stay home to care for the couple's two young daughters while the husband worked.

On Feb. 1, Khine's husband got a phone call from a friend, telling him about the military takeover.

"He looked really sad, angry and couldn't talk much," Khine told the AP by phone.

In the weeks that followed, protests calling for the military to restore democracy and free imprisoned politicians rippled through the country. Khine and her husband joined the crowds.

In late March, as security forces began using lethal force to crack down on protests, Khine was babysitting when demonstrators came to her home to tell her that her husband had been shot. They took him to two clinics but both refused to treat him. He died when they reached a hospital.

"He suddenly disappeared," she said. "Before the coup, I had never imagined that our family life would fall apart like this."

Her husband is one of at least 1,490 people killed by the military since the takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a group that monitors verified arrests and deaths in Myanmar. Over 11,775 have been arrested, according to the group.

Since her husband's death, Khine has started working at a garment factory, earning \$3 a day. Unable to afford their old apartment after the loss of her husband's income, the family has moved into a small room. She worries about being able to provide for her children and their mental health.

"My eldest daughter is becoming traumatized," said Khine. "She often says, 'My friends have their fathers, but I don't.'"

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#### THE DISPLACED: "FLEEING THE WAR IS EXHAUSTING"

Bomb blasts, gunfire and artillery shelling have followed 63-year-old Mee at every shelter she's been forced to flee to over the past year.

She first had to flee to a camp for the displaced after fighting broke out near her village in eastern Myanmar. A month later, the camp was no longer safe, and the medicine she needed for her heart disease and hypertension wasn't available. With nowhere else to go, Mee moved to a relative's house.

"While we were there, gunfire was heard," Mee told the AP by phone "We decided not to run away, even if we died, because fleeing the war is exhausting."

Not long after, the area near her relative's house was bombed, and she had to move once more. For now, Mee shares a small barn with 15 other people, all of them displaced. She has enough medicine only for two months and is concerned about the future of her family and the country.

As of Jan. 17, the U.N. refugee agency estimates the number of the displaced since the army takeover at 405,700. Another 32,000 have fled to neighboring countries.

"I am worried and tired every day," Mee said. "For now, my hope is that I just want to see peace and calm. Then, I want to go back to my house."



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### THE SURGEON: “LIVES HAVE TO BE SACRIFICED”

Before the military seized power, the 28 year-old assistant surgeon was studying for his exams to become a specialist. He lived with his family and would take pride in treating patients at the hospital he worked at in a major city.

On the morning of the takeover, he went to work, seeing military vehicles on the roads and helicopters overhead. The phones and internet were cut. Stepping into the hospital, he learned the military had detained the country’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The next day, he and other health care workers in state-run hospitals quit, sparking what would become known as the Civil Disobedience Movement.

“After the military coup, we no longer wanted to work under them. We believed all the health sectors will have no progress under the military,” he told the AP by phone.

Myanmar has become one of the most dangerous places in the world for health care workers, according to Physicians for Human Rights. It said 30 health workers were killed and 286 arrested between the takeover and Jan. 10.

Seeing his colleagues getting arrested, the surgeon fled to an area controlled by an armed opposition group. He has worked in makeshift clinics made of tents in camps for four months, treating people with general illnesses and those wounded by military shelling and land mines.

Medicine is hard to find, with security forces arresting anyone transporting medication.

“We have to carry medicine secretly. That’s why it takes about a month for medicine to arrive,” he said. “Even if cars are carrying paracetamol or something like that, they’re arrested.”

The surgeon still dreams of being able to return home to take the exams for a specialist.

“But dreams and reality are different,” he said. “The people are suffering from the oppression of the military council. Lives have to be sacrificed for the revolution.”

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### THE JOURNALIST: “WE DARE NOT TAKE OUT OUR CAMERAS”

The videographer knew journalists had to show the world what was happening in Myanmar. Setting aside their anger and sadness about the military takeover, they went to the streets to document protests and brutal crackdowns with their phones day after day.

“We dare not take out our cameras” for fear of arrest, the videographer told the AP by phone. “Things are getting worse.”

Facing increasing threats, many of the videographer’s colleagues fled to the jungle to join armed resistance groups. Others have been arrested. By Dec. 1, more journalists were arrested in Myanmar than every country in the world except China, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. At least two journalists have been killed and others tortured while in detention, the group said.

Yet the videographer continues to work, realizing that any report could be the last one.

“I’m working like an underground journalist,” the videographer said. “In case of an emergency, I have prepared a bag if I need to run.”

Despite the threats, the journalist has no intention of leaving the country.

“The international community only knows about the military’s atrocities through the media,” the videographer said. “But I will continue to do this work until I can’t do it. If the security forces chase and catch me — let them.”

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#### THE FIGHTER: “I DECIDED I WOULD TAKE UP ARMS”

After watching fellow peaceful protesters get shot in the head by military forces, the 47 year-old made a decision.

“I decided I would take up arms, and I started looking for options to actually do so,” he said.

His protests had started peacefully. After the military takeover, he began organizing rallies in Yangon. But as the weeks passed, he knew his safety was in jeopardy.

“I stopped living in my apartment,” he said. “I also had to ask my family to leave that apartment to a secret location so that (the military) could not harm them.”

But when the protests turned deadly, he realized he wanted to take a step further.

“I never thought I would find myself involved in a struggle,” he told the AP by phone.

The man is just one of thousands of people in Myanmar who have joined loose-knit guerilla groups called People’s Defense Forces. Some have forged alliances with armed ethnic groups that have been at war with Myanmar military for decades, while others have pledged allegiance to the opposition National Unity Government, a parallel administration that declared a “defensive war” against the military in September.

Before the takeover, the man enjoyed going to restaurants with his family, shopping trips to the mall and spending time with his children in their home when he wasn’t working at a nongovernment organization involved in the decades-long peace process.

His days are now spent on missions he is hesitant to speak about for security reasons. He lives in an area of a jungle controlled by an armed ethnic group, carrying multiple weapons wherever he goes. He and his comrades forage for whatever they can to survive and sleep in hammocks strung between trees.

“The life I enjoyed is no longer available,” he said.

The man said he is frustrated by the international community’s lack of response, and that the people of Myanmar have had to take matters into their own hands.

“We have the right to use violence to defend ourselves while the international community stands by.”

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BANGKOK (AP) — The army takeover in Myanmar a year ago that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi not only unexpectedly aborted the country’s fledgling return to democracy. It also brought a surprising level of popular resistance, which has blossomed into a low-level but persistent insurgency.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the commander of Myanmar’s military — known as the Tatmadaw — seized power on the morning of Feb. 1, 2021, arresting Suu Kyi and top members of her government and ruling National League for Democracy party, which won a landslide election victory in November 2020.

The military's use of deadly force to hold on to power has escalated conflict with its civilian opponents to the point that some experts describe the country as being in a state of civil war.

The costs have been high, with some 1,500 people killed by the security forces, almost 8,800 detained, an unknown number tortured and disappeared, and more than 300,000 displaced as the military razes villages to root out resistance.

Other consequences are also significant. Civil disobedience hampered transport, banking services and government agencies, slowing an economy already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. The public health system collapsed, leaving the fight against COVID-19 abandoned for months. Higher education stalled as faculty and students sympathetic to the revolt boycotted school, or were arrested.

The military-installed government was not at all anticipating the level of resistance that arose, Thomas Kean, an analyst of Myanmar affairs consulting for the International Crisis Group think tank, told The Associated Press.

"We saw in the first days after the coup, they tried to adopt a sort of business-as-usual approach," with the generals denying they were implementing any significant change, but only removing Suu Kyi from power, he said.

"And of course, you know, that unleashed these huge protests that were brutally crushed, which resulted in people turning to armed struggle."

The army has dealt with the revolt by employing the same brutal tactics in the country's rural heartland that it has long unleashed against ethnic minorities in border areas, which critics have charged amount to crimes against humanity and genocide.

Its violence has generated newfound empathy for ethnic minorities such as the Karen, the Kachin and the Rohingya, longtime targets of army abuses with whom members of the Burman majority now are making common anti-military cause.

People opposed the army takeover because they had come to enjoy representative government and liberalization after years of military rule, said David Steinberg, a senior scholar of Asian Studies at Georgetown University.

Youth turned out in droves to protest despite the risks, he said, because they had neither families nor careers to lose, but saw their futures at risk.

They also enjoyed tactical advantages that previous generations of protesters lacked, he noted. Myanmar had caught up with the rest of the world in technology, and people were able to organize strikes and demonstrations using cellphones and the internet, despite efforts to limit communications.

A driving force was the Civil Disobedience Movement, founded by health care workers, which encouraged actions such as boycotts of military products and people not paying electricity bills or buying lottery tickets.

Kept in detention by the military, Suu Kyi has played no active part in these developments.

The ruling generals, who have said they will probably hold a new election by 2023, have tied her up with a variety of criminal charges widely seen as trumped-up to keep her from returning to political life. The 76-year-old Suu Kyi has already been sentenced to six years' imprisonment, with the prospect of many more being added.

But in the days after the army's takeover, her party's elected members of parliament laid the groundwork for sustained resistance. Prevented by the army from taking their seats, they convened on their own, and in

April established the National Unity Government, or NUG, which stakes a claim to being the country's legitimate administrative body and has won the loyalty of many citizens.

The NUG has also sought to coordinate armed resistance, helping organize "People's Defense Forces," or PDFs, homegrown militias formed at the local and neighborhood levels. The military deems the NUG and the PDFs "terrorist" organizations.

With urban demonstrations mostly reduced to flash mobs to avoid crackdowns, the battle against military rule has largely passed to the countryside, where the badly outgunned local militias carry out guerrilla warfare.

The army's "Four Cuts" strategy aims to eradicate the militias' threat by cutting off their access to food, funds, information and recruitment. Civilians suffer collateral damage as soldiers block essential supplies, take away suspected militia supporters and raze whole villages.

When the military enters a village, "they'll burn down some houses, maybe shoot some people, take prisoners and torture them — the sort of horrific abuses that we're seeing on a regular basis," said analyst Kean.

"But when the soldiers leave, they lose control of that area. They don't have enough manpower to maintain control when 80% to 90% of the population is against them."

Some ethnic minority groups with decades of experience fighting the Myanmar military offer critical support to the PDF militia movement, including supplying training and some weapons, while also providing safe havens for opposition activists and others fleeing the army.

"We never accept a coup at all for whatever reason. The position of our organization is clear," Padoh Saw Taw Nee, the chief of the Karen National Union's foreign affairs department, told the AP. "We oppose any military dictatorship. Therefore, the automatic response is that we must work with those who oppose the military."

He said his group began preparing immediately after the takeover to receive people fleeing from military persecution and noted that it played a similar role in 1988 after a failed popular uprising.

There is a quid pro quo — the NUG says it will honor the minority ethnic groups' demands for greater autonomy when it takes power.

The military, meanwhile, keeps the pressure on the Karen with periodic attacks, including by air, that send villagers fleeing for safety across a river that forms the border with Thailand.

The support of the ethnic groups is seen as key to sustaining the resistance, the thought being that as long as they can engage the army, its forces will be too stretched to finish off the PDFs.

No other factors are seen as capable of tilting the balance in favor of the military or the resistance.

Sanctions on the ruling generals can make them uncomfortable — U.S. actions, especially, have caused financial distress — but Russia and China have been reliable allies, especially willing to sell arms. The U.N. and organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are seen as toothless at best.

"I see the stage sort of set for a prolonged conflict. Neither side seems willing to back down or sees it as in their interest or a necessity to back down or to make concessions in any way to the other," said analyst Kean.

"And so it's just very difficult to see how the conflict will diminish, will reduce in the near term, even over a period of several years. It's just very difficult to see peace returning to many areas of Myanmar."

HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Israel president first official visit to UAE</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-dubai-united-arab-emirates-abu-dhabi-6e72a5350e67cbe02c48a4c6ca751169">https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-dubai-united-arab-emirates-abu-dhabi-6e72a5350e67cbe02c48a4c6ca751169</a>
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israel’s figurehead president arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Sunday in the first official visit by the country’s head of state, the latest sign of deepening ties between the two nations as tensions rise in the region.</p> <p>The UAE and Israel normalized relations in the fall of 2020, part of a series of U.S.-brokered diplomatic deals between Israel and Arab states that had long avoided formal relations with Israel over its decades-old conflict with the Palestinians.</p> <p>The office of President Isaac Herzog said he would be meeting top officials including Abu Dhabi’s powerful Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the de facto Emirati leader, along with members of the country’s small but growing Jewish expat community. He also was expected to visit Expo 2020, the world’s fair in Dubai, where Israel has hosted a series of events at its national pavilion.</p> <p>Upon landing in Abu Dhabi, Herzog was greeted with a warm handshake by Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. They then held talks in the royal palace.</p> <p>The president plays a largely ceremonial role as a national unifier in Israel’s parliamentary system, where the prime minister holds the most power. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett last month made his first official <a href="#">visit to the Gulf Arab sheikhdom</a> and discussed strengthening relations on a number of fronts with Sheikh Mohammed.</p> <p>Shortly before takeoff, Herzog said he sought to bring on his visit “the message of peace from Israel to the United Arab Emirates, and to all the peoples in the region.”</p> <p>The show of Israel-Emirati cooperation comes at a delicate time for the Middle East.</p> <p>Fighting in Yemen’s seven-year civil war has intensified, widening to reach Emirati soil for the first time this month. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels fighting the Saudi-led coalition claimed aerial attacks against Abu Dhabi – <a href="#">one that killed three workers at an industrial area</a> and <a href="#">another that was intercepted</a> and scattered missile shards over the capital.</p> <p>The assaults shocked residents, puncturing the sense of safety pervasive in the region’s globalized business hub. The Houthis have threatened further strikes this week.</p> <p>Meanwhile, negotiations in Vienna between world powers and Iran to curb Tehran’s rapidly expanding nuclear program paused on Friday, with <a href="#">European officials saying</a> the talks had approached “the final stage.” Former President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the landmark nuclear deal nearly four years ago in a move welcomed by Israel and America’s Gulf Arab allies and reimposed harsh sanctions on Iran.</p> <p>Shared enmity of Iran and mutual fears over its nuclear program helped push the UAE and Israel to formalize relations after years of clandestine ties.</p> <p>Palestinian leaders have condemned the normalization deal as a betrayal of their cause for statehood.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 NKorea longest-range missile test in 4yrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/seoul-n-korea-launches-projectile-in-7th-test-in-2022/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/seoul-n-korea-launches-projectile-in-7th-test-in-2022/</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Sunday fired what appeared to be the most powerful missile it has tested since President Joe Biden took office, as it revives its old playbook in brinkmanship to wrest concessions from Washington and neighbors amid a prolonged stalemate in diplomacy.</p>

The Japanese and South Korean militaries said the missile was launched on a lofted trajectory, apparently to avoid the territorial spaces of neighbors, and reached a maximum altitude of 2,000 kilometers (1,242 miles) and traveled 800 kilometers (497 miles) before landing in the sea.

The flight details suggest the North tested its longest-range ballistic missile since 2017, when it twice flew intermediate-range ballistic missiles over Japan and, separately, three intercontinental ballistic missiles that demonstrated the potential to reach deep into the American homeland.

Sunday's test was North Korea's seventh round of launches this month. The unusually fast pace of tests indicates its intent to pressure the Biden administration over long-stalled nuclear negotiations as pandemic-related difficulties put further stress on an economy broken by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in called an emergency National Security Council meeting where he described the test as a possible "mid-range ballistic missile launch" that brought North Korea to the brink of breaking its 2018 self-imposed moratorium on the testing of nuclear devices and longer-range missiles.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi also told reporters that the missile was the longest-range the North has tested since its Hwasong-15 ICBM in November 2017.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un chaired a ruling party meeting on Jan. 20, where senior party members made a veiled threat to lift the moratorium, citing what they perceived as U.S. hostility and threats.

The latest launch suggests Kim's moratorium is already broken, said Lee Choon Geun, a missile expert and honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

In his strongest comments toward the North in years, Moon said the situation around the Korean Peninsula is beginning to resemble 2017, when North Korea's provocative run in nuclear and long-range missile testing resulted in an exchange of war threats between Kim and Trump.

Moon said the North's latest moves violated U.N. Security Council resolutions and were a "challenge toward the international community's efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, stabilize peace and find a diplomatic solution" to the nuclear standoff.

The North "should stop its actions that create tensions and pressure and respond to the dialogue offers by the international community including South Korea and the United States," Moon said, according to his office.

Moon had ambitiously pushed for inter-Korean engagement and held three summits with Kim in 2018 while also lobbying to set up Kim's first summit with Trump in 2018, where they issued vague aspirations for a nuclear-free peninsula.

But the diplomacy derailed after the collapse of the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korea's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said Sunday's missile flew for around 30 minutes and landed in waters outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. There were no immediate reports of damage to boats or aircraft.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the United States condemned North Korea's testing activity and called on Pyongyang to refrain from further destabilizing acts. It said the latest launch did not "pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel, territory, or that of our allies."

Takehiro Funakoshi, director-general for Asian and Oceanian Affairs at Japan's Foreign Ministry, discussed the launch in separate phone calls with Sung Kim, Biden's special envoy for North Korea, and

Noh Kyu-duk, South Korea's nuclear envoy. The officials shared an understanding that Sunday's missile was of enhanced destructive power and reaffirmed trilateral cooperation in the face of the North Korean threat, Japan's Foreign Ministry said.

Experts say the North could halt its testing spree after the start of the Beijing Winter Olympics next week out of respect for China, its major ally and economic lifeline. But there's also expectation that it could significantly up the ante in weapons demonstrations once the Olympics end in February to grab the attention of the Biden administration, which has been focusing more on confronting China and Russia over its conflict with Ukraine.

"North Korea is launching a frenzy of missiles before the start of the Beijing Olympics, mostly as military modernization efforts. Pyongyang also wants to boost national pride as it gears up to celebrate political anniversaries in the context of economic struggles," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"It wants to remind Washington and Seoul that trying to topple it would be too costly. By threatening stability in Asia while global resources are stretched thin elsewhere, Pyongyang is demanding the world compensate it to act like a 'responsible nuclear power,'" Easley added.

North Korea has justified its testing activity as an exercise of its rights to self-defense and threatened stronger action after the Biden administration imposed fresh sanctions following two tests of a purported hypersonic missile earlier this month.

While desperate for outside relief, Kim has showed no willingness to surrender the nuclear weapons and missiles he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival. Analysts say Kim's pressure campaign is aimed at forcing Washington to accept the North as a nuclear power and convert their nuclear disarmament-for-aid diplomacy into negotiations for mutual arms-reduction.

Kim last year announced a new five-year plan for developing weapons and issued an ambitious wish list that included hypersonic weapons, spy satellites, solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched nuclear missiles.

State media said Friday that Kim visited an unspecified munitions factory producing a "major weapons system," and that the workers pledged loyalty to their leader who "smashes with his bold pluck the challenges of U.S. imperialists and their vassal forces."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Ongoing concrete union strike 'significant'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/concrete-worker-strike-halts-construction-projects-light-rail-expansion/281-d20582d0-0a22-40c7-81b6-beae4efd9ea6">https://www.king5.com/article/news/concrete-worker-strike-halts-construction-projects-light-rail-expansion/281-d20582d0-0a22-40c7-81b6-beae4efd9ea6</a>
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — An ongoing strike of concrete truckers and drivers is slowing down or stopping major projects in the Seattle region, including the light rail expansion, resulting in hundreds of layoffs.</p> <p>"This is about as significant as it gets, it's affecting every project in the region that has any scope related to concrete," said Bill Ketcham, general manager of Turner Construction Seattle.</p> <p>The Teamsters Local 174 union representing concrete mixer drivers and cement plant employees has been in a standoff with concrete companies since late last year, and 330 workers are now striking, the union said in a statement.</p> <p>Turner halted construction of a Meta (formerly Facebook) building in Bellevue's Spring District on Friday because the company has been unable to get concrete for the site.</p> <p>"We had 165 people on that job site prior to the strike, that number has come down, week by week, little by little, to the point today where it just didn't make any sense to keep the job going," Ketcham said.</p>



Sound Transit said the strike is slowing construction of the light rail extension to Lynnwood, the Eastside, downtown Redmond, and Federal Way.

The agency said it's missed deliveries of about 1,400 truckloads of concrete since December.

"As of (Thursday) our contractors have had to lay off more than 174 workers from our construction sites due to the lack of concrete and delays to associated work, with additional layoffs threatening an additional 120 workers at the end of this month," said Peter Rogoff, Sound Transit CEO, during a board meeting, Thursday.

The Teamsters Local 174 said it's willing to talk through and work around key disagreements in the negotiations, but said the concrete companies are not budging.

"Even the lead negotiators on the Teamsters' side, who have decades of combined experience negotiating industry-leading contracts, were stunned by the Employers' utter disregard for the process of conflict resolution and contract negotiation," the Teamsters said in a statement.

Four concrete companies said in a statement that they've provided the Teamsters with the best package they have ever offered, which includes a nearly 18% pay increase over the next three years. The employers said they did not lock out their workers, who can end the strike tomorrow and continue bargaining while they resume construction.

"Once concrete starts flowing again, and we're hoping that is soon, it's going to take time for the other trades and the other work to catch up to where they've left off," Ketcham said.

The two sides met with a federal mediator recently, but that did not resolve their differences. The union and companies have not said whether they plan to meet again anytime soon.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Sound Transit 30-40% non-paying rides
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/sound-transit-fare-evasion-non-payment-on-the-rise/281-f7013ebd-68ad-4866-b822-0a87b8edb11a">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/sound-transit-fare-evasion-non-payment-on-the-rise/281-f7013ebd-68ad-4866-b822-0a87b8edb11a</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The number of riders who aren't paying their fare is on the rise, according to Sound Transit officials.</p> <p>Pre-pandemic, about 4% of riders used Sound Transit without paying their fare. However, fare-evasion has spiked since then. One estimate suggests between 10% to 30% of riders aren't paying for a ticket. A different estimate suggests the number could be much higher, between 40% and 70%.</p> <p>Sound Transit suspects the true number is likely in between those estimates, in the 30-40% range.</p> <p>Fare evasion isn't an issue with one particular community or demographic, the problem is system-wide, according to the agency.</p> <p>The transportation organization has options for riders who can't afford fares. Sound Transit CEO Peter Rogoff said he's more concerned with those who can afford the ticket but still choose not to pay. Rogoff said he saw the scale of fare-evasion firsthand attending Mariners games this fall.</p> <p>"Folks who are paying 60, 80, 100 bucks for a seat, they're paying \$13 a pop for a beer, and then they came down to stadium station and they weren't tapping on or they weren't buying tickets, we need to reverse that," Rogoff said.</p>

Fare evasion is compounding the revenue loss Sound Transit already saw due to the pandemic. Ridership fell by 67% and profits dropped from nearly \$100 million in 2019 to just \$30 million in 2020, according to a report from the agency.

Revenue from fares is earmarked to cover 6% of the agency's costs, including operations and construction, through 2046. Current operations and construction projects are fully funded, but completing future projects on time remains dependent on Sound Transit earning enough revenue from riders.

Sound Transit is currently testing out a program emphasizing educating passengers on fare requirements and encouraging eligible passengers to sign up for reduced-fare options. Over the course of the pilot, citations for non-payment are suspended.

In order to cut down on non-payment, the agency is working to expand access to the reduced fare program and subsidized passes. Sound Transit is working on getting ORCA-LIFT cards to 80% of eligible riders, instead of just the 38% who are currently enrolled.

When citations return, Sound Transit is planning to give passengers more warnings before riders who don't pay their fare receive a fine. Passengers caught for a third time evading fare would receive a \$50 fine, which would increase to \$75 for a fourth infraction. The fines could be paid by loading the \$50 or \$75 onto an ORCA card.

On a fifth infraction, Sound Transit maintains the ability to refer a \$124 fine to district court for resolution and/or dispute as a civil infraction instead of a criminal referral.

In the past, riders who were evading fare would receive a \$124 fine after the first warning.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Edmonds celebrates Lunar New Year</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/entertainment-news/edmonds-first-lunar-new-year-celebration/281-d82038b0-2df4-4763-8cef-2b1e0e60440d">https://www.king5.com/article/news/entertainment-news/edmonds-first-lunar-new-year-celebration/281-d82038b0-2df4-4763-8cef-2b1e0e60440d</a>
GIST	<p>EDMONDS, Wash. — Saturday, the city of Edmonds held its first official city-sanctioned Lunar New Year celebration, organized by community members and business owners.</p> <p>The celebration spurred from a discussion among members of the Edmonds Diversity Commission about the importance of representation in city-recognized holiday celebrations.</p> <p>"The city of Edmonds decided to create this really wonderful event to involve all of Edmonds and the Asian culture that exists within," said committee member Shubert Ho. "It's really important to just represent what the community has to offer and who lives in this community. We know Seattle, the greater Seattle area, has a huge Asian population, and we're here to provide the festivities and an open space for everybody to congregate."</p> <p>Events included an online-based Lunar New Year Storytime, Lion Dance performances and Kung Fu demonstrations, a free community movie and local art.</p> <p>"We've had some feedback from the community that they would like to see some other events and some good representation of everyone in our community," Nikki Okimoto Glaros said. "It was just really wonderful to see the community show up, and I just want to wish everybody a happy Lunar New Year."</p> <p>It was a chance to celebrate as a community and raise awareness of the different cultures present in Edmonds.</p> <p>"Edmonds has a great Asian culture and a huge area on Highway 99 where we have tons of Asian eateries and businesses that exist, it's been a mainstay of Edmonds for a long time and I think it's great we're finally starting to celebrate Lunar New Year," Ho said.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Local pharmacies distribute free N95 masks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/local-pharmacies-in-seattle-begin-distributing-free-n95-masks">https://komonews.com/news/local/local-pharmacies-in-seattle-begin-distributing-free-n95-masks</a>
GIST	<p>Some local pharmacies are now handing out free N95 masks. It's all part of a federal plan to give out 400 million higher quality masks.</p> <p>Up to three free masks are available to every person in the U.S.</p> <p>The masks are coming from the Strategic National Stockpile. The free mask program was announced by the Biden administration last week.</p> <p>Free N95 masks were up for grabs Saturday at the Bartell Drugs store on 5th and Olive in Downtown Seattle.</p> <p>"We were wandering around wondering where to get booster shot and wandered in and asked our question, we saw the table and viola, there's masks," said Rick Kreuser. "I didn't expect it at all, honestly."</p> <p>In fact, most people we talked to didn't know about it.</p> <p>"We just lucked out by showing up here and being told that we could get some. It would have been nice if we could pick them up somewhere else and knew about it for sure," said Olivia Christensen.</p> <p>"I just happened to walk in and they had them," said Lori Beyers.</p> <p>She says the free higher grade masks mean a lot for her because she's high-risk.</p> <p>"If I came down with COVID, having COVID, that would be really bad," said Beyers. "I lost two family members."</p> <p>The CDC now says N95s are more effective at preventing the spread of COVID than cloth masks.</p> <p>"I hate the blue ones; they don't fit right," said Beyers. "I want to be safe because this is a no-joke virus."</p> <p>Not every pharmacy has free N95 masks from the federal government to distribute.</p> <p>"Some organizations are expecting them and others have declined to get them," said Pharmacist Michael Donahue, owner of Bob Johnson's Pharmacy.</p> <p>Bob Johnson's Pharmacy has gotten a number of calls. That's made a busy pharmacy even more stressed.</p> <p>"Logistically, they (the federal government) didn't tell us they were going to do this. They didn't ask us they were going to do it, and they weren't prepared to do it," said Donahue.</p> <p>He advises people to check online first to see if the masks are available.</p> <p>"Look on websites. If we have it available, we'll let you know on the website or social media. Calling us is really problematic. It actually interferes with our ability to take care of patients," said Donahue.</p> <p>QFC and Fred Meyer stores say they plan on distributing the masks but do not have them available yet.</p> <p>Free N95 high-quality masks are expected to be available at stores like Costco, CVS, Rite Aid and Walgreens.</p> <p>For a full list of pharmacies participating in this program, <a href="#">click here</a>.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Lynnwood bar 'catch the virus' show</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/lynnwood-bar-advertised-catch-the-virus-show">https://www.q13fox.com/news/lynnwood-bar-advertised-catch-the-virus-show</a>
GIST	<p><b>LYNNWOOD, Wash.</b> - In the past week, a pirate-themed bar in <a href="#">Lynnwood</a> has lost staff, bands and other customers — over a show with advertised discounted prices for people sick with <a href="#">COVID-19</a>.</p> <p>The Vessel Taphouse posted on Facebook on Friday, Jan. 21 that people should come see the show maybe catch the virus or just stay home and whine, The Daily Herald <a href="#">reported</a>.</p> <p>The post also said people could enter the bar for a discounted rate with proof of omicron positive test. Owner Steve Hartley said four employees quit and three bands refused to play another show that weekend. Hartley told the newspaper the post was "an ill-advised attempt at humor," and the responsible employee has been fired.</p> <p>The employee's identity is being protected, he said, because of "pretty nasty" online comments, he added.</p> <p>"We were getting comments that we were trying to infect the public," Hartley said. "Clearly we have no interest in that. People aren't going to come and drink if they get sick, and we know that."</p> <p>Hartley said the post stemmed from frustrations over people and bands who are hesitant to turn out due to the pandemic. When bands have been paid some money up front and then back out last-minute, he said, "it's hard for us to hold them accountable for obvious reasons."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 China ambassador warns Taiwan conflict</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/china-ambassador-us-warns-possible-military-conflict-taiwan">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/china-ambassador-us-warns-possible-military-conflict-taiwan</a>
GIST	<p>China's ambassador to the US has said the two countries could face a "military conflict" over the future of <a href="#">Taiwan</a>, in an unusually explicit reference to the prospect of war.</p> <p>"The Taiwan issue is the biggest tinderbox between <a href="#">China</a> and the United States," Qin Gang told the US public broadcaster National Public Radio (NPR), on Friday. "If the Taiwanese authorities, emboldened by the United States, keep going down the road for independence, it most likely will involve China and the United States, the two big countries, in the military conflict."</p> <p>Tensions over the island's place in the world continue to grow. <a href="#">Beijing considers Taiwan</a> to be a breakaway province of China. In November the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, told Joe Biden that any support for Taiwanese independence from the US would be "like playing with fire" and that "those who play with fire will get burned".</p> <p>Beijing has been ratcheting up its pressure on the democratically ruled island in recent years. In October Xi vowed to realise "reunification" with Taiwan by peaceful means. But on Sunday China's air force flew 39 warplanes into Taiwan's air defence identification zone – the largest daily number since October.</p> <p>The US and some of its allies have in the past few months advocated for Taiwan's "meaningful participation in the UN system", a move that angered China. The UK parliament's foreign affairs committee reportedly plans to visit Taiwan next month.</p> <p>Qin blamed the current state of affairs on the Taiwanese administration. He accused it of "seek[ing] its independence agenda by borrowing the support and the encouragement of the United States". He added: "And the United States is playing the Taiwan card to contain China."</p> <p>Analysts say that although Qin's warning to Washington is unusual, he also pointed out in the NPR interview that the bilateral ties constituted China's "most important relationship".</p>

	<p>“Such a confrontation would risk a permanent rupture in the bilateral relationship,” said Ali Wyne, a senior analyst on US-China relations at Eurasia Group in Washington. “While China often avows that its ‘great rejuvenation’ is predicated upon Taiwan’s reunification with the mainland, there are probably few other steps Beijing could take that would undermine its long-term strategic prospects as greatly as attacking Taipei.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Winter Olympics jump in daily Covid cases</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/beijing-winter-olympics-reports-jump-in-daily-covid-cases">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/beijing-winter-olympics-reports-jump-in-daily-covid-cases</a>
GIST	<p>China has reported a jump in Covid cases among athletes and team officials at the Beijing Winter Olympics.</p> <p>The number of daily Covid infections rose to 19 on Friday from two a day earlier, and Games organisers said more cases could be expected in the coming days.</p> <p>Thirty-six Games-related personnel, including the athletes and officials, have been found to be infected, 29 when they arrived at the airport in Beijing and seven already in the “closed loop” bubble that separates event personnel from the public, the organising committee said in a statement on Saturday.</p> <p>“We are now just going through the peak period of people arriving in China and therefore we expect to see the highest numbers at this stage,” the Games’ medical chief, Brian McCloskey, told a news conference.</p> <p>Organisers are confident in their Covid-19 prevention system and infections are unlikely to leak out to the public, he said.</p> <p>Cases among athletes and team officials exceeded those for “other stakeholders”, including media, sponsors and staff, for the first time since China started releasing daily numbers of Olympics-related coronavirus cases on 23 January, according to a Reuters tally of previous statements.</p> <p>“It’s annoying that every morning you need to get up a little earlier specially to get a PCR test. I think that in a few days, it will be like brushing your teeth,” the Russian ice hockey player Anton Slepyshev told the RIA news agency.</p> <p>“Everyone is concerned that the test result will suddenly turn out to be positive, but the reality is such that we are living with Covid. We accept all the risks and fears.”</p> <p>The Games are to run from Friday to 20 February, its bubble sealed off from the rest of China, where the government’s zero-tolerance Covid-19 policy has all but shut the country’s border to international arrivals.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Scientists create cheap test kit for Covid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/us-scientists-develop-cheap-smartphone-based-test-kit-for-covid">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/28/us-scientists-develop-cheap-smartphone-based-test-kit-for-covid</a>
GIST	<p>Scientists have developed a highly sensitive Covid test that relies only on low-tech kit and a smartphone, which could be used as a quicker, cheaper alternative to PCR testing.</p> <p>The team behind the 25-minute saliva test say it provides a highly reliable platform for testing in the workplace or at home. It requires a basic lab kit that includes a cardboard box, a small hot plate and LED light that can be produced for less than £75. The cost of running a test, including the reagents, is about a 10th of a PCR test and is also cheaper than a lateral flow test. The <a href="#">team's findings are published in the journal JAMA Network Open</a>.</p> <p>“As new Covid variants emerge globally, testing and detection remain essential to pandemic control efforts,” said Dr Michael Mahan, of the University of California, Santa Barbara and lead author. “Nearly</p>

	<p>half the world's population has a smartphone, and we believe that this holds exciting potential to provide fair and equal access to precision diagnostic medicine.”</p> <p>The test uses a process called Loop-mediated Isothermal Amplification (Lamp) to amplify viral RNA in the saliva and detect specific target genes. The app, which is freely available, uses a smartphone's camera to measure colour changes indicating a chemical reaction and determines a diagnosis in 25 minutes. When tested in 50 patients with Covid, it matched PCR testing for sensitivity. The same technique was also applied successfully to diagnosing flu infections.</p> <p>Alexander Edwards, of the University of Reading, said the work demonstrates it is possible to move testing out of the laboratory. “This interesting report is important in showing the accuracy of a relatively simple test for virus in swabs from clinical samples,” he said. “However, many other research groups have already shown that this type of technology and test simplification can work. The challenge remains how to deliver large-scale products based on this type of technology, and to make simple, accessible products that people can make use of.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Pacific islands explosion in case numbers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/fear-and-dread-covid-free-for-two-years-pacific-islands-experience-explosion-in-case-numbers">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/29/fear-and-dread-covid-free-for-two-years-pacific-islands-experience-explosion-in-case-numbers</a>
GIST	<p>The virus has swept into remote island countries, sowing panic and confusion</p> <p>Covid-free for almost two years, some Pacific island nations are suddenly struggling with an explosion in cases as the virus, thought in most cases to be the more transmissible variant Omicron, breaches the defences they had so successfully put up since the beginning of the pandemic.</p> <p>Kiribati, Samoa, Palau and Solomon Islands have all experienced outbreaks within the last three weeks. The countries have approached the arrival of the virus with different strategies, some imposing lockdowns while others rely on their high levels of vaccination for protection.</p> <p>Given their remoteness and the fragility of health systems there are nevertheless concerns about how they will cope, with many locals fearful.</p> <p><b>Kiribati: ‘taken by surprise’</b></p> <p>Covid arrived in Kiribati two weeks ago, when two-thirds of the 54 passengers on a plane from Fiji, the first international flight to arrive in ten months, <a href="#">were diagnosed with the virus on arrival</a>.</p> <p>Since then the situation has spiralled. The island nation now has a total of 201 cases as of Friday, and the virus has spread from the capital, Tarawa, to Butaritari, an outer island located 186km to the north.</p> <p>The government has imposed a full lockdown, extended on Thursday for another week, with people only allowed to leave their homes for essential services. The Butaritari cases arrived on a ship from Tarawa, but were not tested until they had already spent several days in the community.</p> <p>South Tarawa businessman Kitina Etau, who comes from Butaritari, is worried about his 70-year-old father who remains on the island.</p> <p>“I was taken by surprise that passengers were allowed to travel on the ship despite the lockdown measures enforced on Saturday,” Etau said.</p> <p>With limited communication on the island, Etau is yet to hear from his father and is worried that though the infected passengers are now in quarantine he may have been in contact with them as his father had been expecting cargo on the ship.</p> <p>As cases escalate, people fear the virus has spread across the islands faster than testing can keep up.</p>



Dr. Tabutoa Eria, a doctor who works both on the frontlines and for the government, wrote on Facebook that medical teams would no longer be dispatched to conduct community testing, appearing to suggest that critical resources were running low.

“We are reserving our testing kits and other resources for patients who have underlying conditions because they will be hit hardest from the virus,” said Eria.

#### **Palau: ‘left to fend for ourselves’**

The first case of community transmission in [Palau](#) was reported on 10 January – by Thursday, just over two weeks later, the Ministry of Health had reported almost 800 cases in the country of just 18,000.

Despite the exponential increase and a plea from traditional chiefs last week, the government has ruled out a lockdown or a closure of the border, putting its faith in the country’s high vaccination rate of 96% of the eligible population (those aged five and over) and evidence that Omicron is less likely to lead to hospitalisation.

Instead it has closed schools and encouraged mask-wearing and social-distancing.

One woman, a mother of four, said that it felt like the government was doing less just as cases were starting to increase.

“Since the inevitable arrival of Covid to our tiny island nation, I feel we are left to fend for ourselves with little to no help from the government,” she said.

It is not clear how the virus entered the community. In a press release on 5 January, the Ministry of Health said only that three positive cases had been identified on 31 December and has not responded to requests for more information citing privacy reasons.

Senator Stevenson Kuartei, who is also a doctor, said the Covid surge was putting additional stress on Palau’s already “thin” health sector, especially as doctors and nurses were “removed” from duty due to Covid.

The Ministry of Health ministry is also running out of isolation spaces.

Health minister Gaafar Uherbelau said he expected a steep increase in cases in the coming weeks, “given how highly transmissible the Omicron variant is, which is what we suspect is in Palau now.”

“We are currently monitoring cases and should there be a surge with those needing to be admitted that would overwhelm the hospital capacity, then we’ll look to implement more community mitigation strategies,” he added.

#### **Solomon Islands: From zero to 100 cases in 12 hours**

The first case of community transmission in Solomon Islands was reported on 19 January; 12 hours later the country had recorded more than 100 cases and within two days 50 nurses at the National Referral hospital, the country’s largest, had tested positive.

“We now need to work together to ensure we get this under control,” prime minister Mannaseh Sogavare said in a nationwide address. The country is enduring its first lockdown, and reported its first two Covid deaths earlier this week as cases [rocketed to almost 700](#).

But with only 59 beds in the national isolation centre in Honiara and the outbreak at its underfunded main hospital, there are fears about the health system’s ability to cope. Its vaccination rate is also low – in a population of about 700,000, just 264,085 vaccine doses had been administered as of 13 January.



“Our people are not ready to handle such an outbreak,” said taxi driver Walter Kito, who added that his business had also suffered and he had no money to support his family. “I appeal to those who have not vaccinated to please do so now.”

### **Samoa: a country in panic**

In a country that lost more than 20% of its population in the 1918 influenza pandemic and more recently lost 83 babies and children in a measles epidemic three years ago, the arrival of Covid-19 has caused panic.

The numbers have grown steadily since 10 passengers tested positive after arriving in [Samoa](#) on a flight from Australia on 19 January. Another 12 passengers and five nurses who cared for them have since tested positive, bringing the total number of cases to 27 as of Thursday.

A lack of clear communication from the government on the cases sowed confusion that was compounded when it did not declare a level 3 alert, which is supposed to be triggered by 10 cases or more.

However, once cases reached 15 on Saturday, the prime minister, Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, declared a 48-hour lockdown which has since been extended. The lockdown includes complete border closures as well as the shutting down of inter-island travel, and internal transportation. In an unprecedented move, Samoa also mandated quarantine for 250 frontline workers who had dealt with the infected passengers and are now camped out in the national hospital at Motootua for 21 days.

“This decision is made for the country and their respective family’s interest,” said Leausa Take Naseri, the director general of health. He also called on quarantine hotel management and staff to self-isolate at their place of employment.

“We must contain any transmission of the virus inside quarantine for the country’s sake.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Study: long Covid abnormality in lungs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/29/long-covid-study-finds-abnormality-in-lungs-that-could-explain-breathlessness">https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/29/long-covid-study-finds-abnormality-in-lungs-that-could-explain-breathlessness</a>
GIST	<p>Abnormalities have been identified in the lungs of long Covid patients that could offer a potential explanation for why some people experience breathlessness long after their initial infection.</p> <p>The findings, from a pilot study involving 36 patients, raise the possibility that Covid may cause microscopic damage to the lungs that is not detected using routine tests.</p> <p>Breathlessness is a symptom in the majority of long Covid patients, but it has been unclear whether this is linked to other factors such as changes in breathing patterns, tiredness, or something more fundamental.</p> <p>According to Dr Emily Fraser, a consultant at Oxford university hospitals and a co-author of the study, the latest findings are the first evidence that underlying lung health could be impaired.</p> <p>“It is the first study to demonstrate lung abnormalities in [people with long Covid] who are breathless and where other investigations are unremarkable,” said Fraser. “It does suggest the virus is causing some kind of persistent abnormality within the microstructure of the lungs or in the pulmonary vasculature.”</p> <p>More work would be required to clarify the clinical significance of the findings, she added, including how the apparent abnormalities relate to breathlessness.</p> <p>Claire Steves, a clinical senior lecturer at King’s College London who was not involved in the work, said the findings would be of significant interest to anyone living with long-term breathlessness after Covid.</p>

“They suggest that the efficiency of the lung in doing what it is meant to do – exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen – may be compromised, even though the structure of the lung appears normal,” she said.

“However, we really need to await the completion of the study to know whether these early findings are robust, and if so, how much they explain, and what the ramifications are in terms of potential treatments.”

Fraser and colleagues are the latest to highlight physiological differences seen in people with long Covid, with [research published this week](#) pointing to an “antibody signature” that could help identify those most at risk.

The latest study, which is aiming to recruit 400 participants, is using a specialised MRI imaging technique in which patients breathe in xenon gas while lying in a scanner. The gas can be traced as it moves from the lungs into the bloodstream, giving a reading of how the lungs are functioning. This contrasts with CT scans, which show just the structure of the lungs.

The pilot compared three groups: patients diagnosed with long Covid who have normal CT scans, people who had been hospitalised with Covid more than three months previously and were not experiencing long Covid, and a healthy control group.

The initial results, published on the [bioRxiv pre-print server](#), show there is “significantly impaired gas transfer” from the lungs to the bloodstream in these long Covid patients, even when other tests are normal. Similar abnormalities have been detected in Covid patients who had been hospitalised with more severe disease.

“These patients have never been in hospital and did not have an acute severe illness when they had their Covid-19 infection,” said Prof Fergus Gleeson, a radiologist at Oxford university hospitals NHS foundation trust and the study’s chief investigator. “Some of them have been experiencing their symptoms for a year after contracting Covid-19.”

Gleeson said the team were now hoping to look at what proportion of patients with long Covid have abnormal scans, and determine the significance of the abnormality and whether it improves over time.

Fraser said the findings did not undermine the relevance of rehabilitation programmes, such as breathing retraining for those with disordered patterns of breathing, for instance. “Rehabilitation strategies are really helpful,” she said. “We can make progress and set people on the right track, so people [shouldn’t] think ‘I’ve got lung damage and so there’s no point’.”

Dr Louise Sigfrid, a public health specialist at the University of Oxford who was not involved in the research, said the findings highlighted the need for those who had continuing symptoms to be given comprehensive diagnostic assessments. “These early findings are really interesting, and in line with other emerging data on lung perfusion defects post-Sars-CoV-2 infection seen in adults as well as adolescents,” she said.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Port congestion across more import gates
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/port-congestion-spreads-across-more-u-s-import-gateways-11643397131?mod=hp_minor_pos13">https://www.wsj.com/articles/port-congestion-spreads-across-more-u-s-import-gateways-11643397131?mod=hp_minor_pos13</a>
GIST	<p>Port congestion is spreading across the country, threatening to extend shipping delays and drive up costs for importers seeking to get around the bottlenecks at Southern California’s big gateway complex.</p> <p>Container ships are backing up off coastlines from Oakland, Calif., to Charleston, S.C., because of a record flow of boxes into and out of the country combined with worker shortages triggered by Covid-19’s fast-spreading Omicron variant.</p>

“It’s supremely frustrating to be an importer right now,” said Nathan Strang, director of ocean trade lane management at Flexport Inc., a San Francisco-based freight forwarder. “Everybody wants to find a relief valve and all of the relief valves have been plugged.”

Ship backups that plagued U.S. ports throughout the pandemic have been mainly [concentrated along the West Coast](#). Niels Madsen, a vice president of operations at Denmark-based Sea-Intelligence ApS, said a rise in backups at East Coast ports suggests congestion is worsening there.

The average wait time for a berth at the busiest East Coast gateway, the Port of New York and New Jersey, extended to 4.2 days last week, according to the port’s data, up from 1.6 days last January. At the Port of Charleston on Thursday, a backup of 19 container ships was waiting offshore for a berth.

New Jersey port officials say its congestion is being caused, in part, by Covid-19-related worker absences. Charleston officials say their backup is mainly due to a surge of imports that has clogged terminals, leaving limited space to unload inbound containers.

The number of containers waiting more than 15 days for pickup at Charleston, the country’s eighth-largest gateway for container imports, exceeded 7,000 boxes last week, an increase of 40% compared with one month earlier, according to supply-chain analytics firm project44. Charleston officials say it could take six weeks to clear the backlog.

Georgia’s Port of Savannah said this month it has cleared a backlog that had grown to [more than 20 vessels](#) late last year. The port opened new [container storage sites](#), including temporary “pop-up” facilities, to make room at terminals for handling boxes, said Griff Lynch, executive director of the Georgia Ports Authority, which operates the Savannah port.

Ports on the West Coast are also struggling. At the Port of Oakland on Thursday, 15 ships waited for a berth. Port officials there attribute the backup to thousands of empty containers that have filled terminals as they await return to Asia.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which make up the nation’s busiest container port complex, have struggled to handle record container flows for more than a year. The queue of ships waiting to enter the port has remained at about 100 vessels for almost two months despite port and Biden administration attempts to clear the backlog. Authorities there said some 800 dockworkers, or about 10% of the handling crews, were unavailable for [Covid-related reasons](#) at one point earlier this month.

Combined import volumes at the Southern California ports last month slumped [to the lowest level](#) in 18 months as port terminals, truckers and warehouses struggled to move boxes inland.

Peter Sand, chief analyst at Xeneta, a Norway-based transportation data firm, said the bottlenecks tie up shipping capacity and contribute to rising ocean rates. Base spot rates to ship a 40-foot container from the Far East to U.S. ports reached their highest levels of the pandemic this month, according to Xeneta.

The average rate to the East Coast is about \$12,000, up from \$3,000 two years ago. The rate to the West Coast is about \$8,500, an increase of about 467% from January 2020.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Wages, benefits rose at 2-decade high
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-employers-labor-costs-inflation-11643331612?mod=hp_lista_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-employers-labor-costs-inflation-11643331612?mod=hp_lista_pos4</a>
GIST	Employers spent 4% more on wages and benefits last year as workers received larger pay raises in a tight labor market, rebounding economy and period of accelerating inflation, marking an increase not seen since 2001.

The U.S. employment-cost index—a quarterly measure of wages and benefits paid by employers—showed that costs continued to rise at the highest rate in two decades. The fourth-quarter gain, compared with a year ago, was 4% on a non-seasonally adjusted basis, the Labor Department said Friday.

Still, the figures offered a sign that labor-cost increases could be easing, with the Labor Department reporting a seasonally adjusted 1% rise in compensation for the fourth quarter, down from with a 1.2% increase the previous three months.

Separate economic figures showed that the Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation, the core personal-consumption expenditures price index, accelerated to 4.9% in December 2021 over the prior year. And household spending fell 0.6% last month, the Commerce Department said Friday, as consumers pulled back on shopping for goods during the last month of the holiday season.

Rising pay and benefits are putting more money in workers' pockets—average hourly wages rose 4.7% in December from a year earlier—but not enough to keep pace with rising prices. Inflation recently hit its fastest pace in nearly four decades amid supply and demand imbalances for both goods and labor related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Economists caution that there are numerous factors contributing to high inflation during the pandemic, especially an overwhelmed supply chain.

"Inflation has fundamentally picked up and I think it's fair to say that price gains are feeding back into wage gains as well," said Ben Herzon, executive director at IHS Markit. "There's a lot of pressure on the supply side on both commodities and labor."

Investors and Federal Reserve policy makers now consider the labor market to be at or near full employment, despite the fact that the economy has only recovered about 84% of the jobs it had before the pandemic. The labor force has shrunk, and with the unemployment rate now below 4%, the Fed is shifting gears from providing stimulus to the economy to fighting inflation while trying to maintain the labor-market recovery.

After signaling that the Fed would begin steadily raising interest rates in March, Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday that he believed that price increases have been primarily tied to the "dislocations caused by the pandemic." But he also said that without more workers returning to the labor market leading to faster growth, higher wages could push prices up.

"We are attentive to the risks that persistent real wage growth in excess of productivity could put upward pressure on inflation," Mr. Powell said.

Wages are rising quickly in disparate parts of the economy, from high-paying finance jobs to lower-paying restaurant and manufacturing positions.

Earlier this month, JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s stock fell on the news that the bank's expenses would rise 8% in 2022, a figure that includes labor costs and other expenses related to the bank's investments. "There's a little bit of labor inflation, and it's important for us to attract and retain the best talent and pay competitively according to performance," Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Barnum said.

McDonald's Corp. has raised menu prices to keep pace with rapidly growing costs, with wages up more than 10% at U.S. restaurants. McDonald's executives have estimated that U.S. menu prices increased about 6% last year on an annual basis, because of increasing costs for labor, food, packaging and other materials. The fast-food company reported a 7.5% increase in U.S. same-store sales for its fourth quarter ended Dec. 31, with the chain attributing the growth to menu price increases and promotions.

"It appears that labor costs are actually accelerating at a much faster pace, and firms have already demonstrated that, in the aggregate, they have significant pricing power to pass those rising costs along to their customers," said Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont.

	<p>Employment costs are rising at uneven rates in different industries, depending on the demand for labor. During the summer, airplane manufacturers and their suppliers saw labor costs jump by 7% in the third quarter, and they rose a further 0.5% during the fourth quarter.</p> <p>At Tool Gauge, a Tacoma, Wa.-based parts manufacturer primarily for Boeing Co. aircraft, the head count dropped from around 220 employees before the pandemic to 84 at the low point. Now, with 95 employees, the company is trying to increase staff to address a backlog of work.</p> <p>“If we had a magic wand, we’d immediately onboard at least another 15 workers,” said Jim Lee, Tool Gauge’s general manager.</p> <p>They have turned to previously retired workers and started to allow part-time work, just to get more hands on deck. Mr. Lee said he recruited one retiree during a chat at a marina. The former employee decided to come in three days a week so he would have more money to spend on his boat, a retirement passion.</p> <p>The company has raised wages for entry-level employees from \$15 to between \$16 and \$18. That required them to adjust salaries for nearly everyone else too, other than a few managers. Combined, the company has had a half-million dollar increase in payroll costs. They are currently in negotiations with customers about factoring in those cost increases into future contracts.</p> <p>“My concern is that we don’t know when this hyperinflation for labor costs will end,” Mr. Lee said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Beset CDC rethinks pandemic response</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/embattled-cdc-rethinks-pandemic-response-after-criticism-of-guidelines-11643371202?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/embattled-cdc-rethinks-pandemic-response-after-criticism-of-guidelines-11643371202?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is looking to reassert itself in the country’s Covid-19 response amid criticism it has sown more confusion than it has offered answers.</p> <p>Among the first orders of business, according to the agency, is upgrading data collection that has hobbled decision making and clearing up messaging that has confused many.</p> <p>Yet the steps may not be enough to fix problems at the nation’s premier public-health agency exposed by the pandemic. And the CDC may not have much time, as a new variant could emerge after Omicron crests.</p> <p>“Moving fast and risk-taking in a setting of ambiguity is not CDC’s strength—it’s not what they do,” said Charity Dean, previously a California Department of Health official who resigned during the pandemic.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Biden administration and lawmakers have begun proposing deeper changes to the federal health apparatus that could eventually upend the CDC if they take effect.</p> <p>The activity follows a rough two years for the agency. Both the Trump and Biden White Houses have influenced its responses to the health crisis, people familiar with the matter say, while the CDC has botched a series of actions and communications.</p> <p>At the outset of the pandemic, the agency supported faulty Covid-19 tests that put the U.S. months behind in instituting a proper surveillance system. It was late to understand that the virus spreads via tiny air particles, not larger droplets, which meant the CDC was slow to recommend masks. Then last summer, before the Delta variant emerged, it suggested people stop wearing masks.</p> <p>Now the CDC is drawing fire for confusing recommendations on when to isolate and test after contracting Omicron.</p>

The confusion has further undermined faith in the nation's public health system at a critical moment. Americans' confidence that the CDC is providing the public with trustworthy information on preventing and treating Covid-19 fell to 72% this month, down from 77% in November, according to a survey released Thursday by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

"When there is doubt, people don't trust the source of the advice anymore, and that has huge implications," said Leana Wen, an emergency physician and public health professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Explaining complicated science to 330 million people is hard, said Ezekiel Emanuel, co-director of the Healthcare Transformation Institute at the University of Pennsylvania and a former member of the Biden administration's disbanded coronavirus advisory board. "It is also true that they have bungled a bunch of things."

Some CDC stumbles are understandable, people inside and outside the agency say. The agency has been forced to make decisions—and explain them—based on limited knowledge in a fast-moving pandemic.

"The messages, to the extent they've been confusing—it's because the scientists, they're learning more," President Biden said last week.

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have exerted influence over some CDC decisions, from when to reopen schools to whether to give broad access to boosters, while controlling much government messaging, according to people familiar with the actions.

The White House said it left the decisions to federal government health experts. The CDC declined to comment.

Yet critics also say the CDC hasn't had enough actionable information to respond in real time because its data collection methods are outdated and it has operated like a slow-moving academic institution.

"Part of the messaging issue is not having adequate data," said Eric Topol, director of the Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, Calif., who said this stems in part from the Department of Health and Human Services' failure to mandate hospitals to collect more information. HHS oversees the CDC.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky recently told The Wall Street Journal she intends to address gaps in national collection of public health data, and the Biden administration has recently invested more resources in that effort.

To help improve communications, Dr. Walensky said, she plans for her and agency experts to give more briefings.

Yet she also asked for understanding of the challenges of quickly explaining to the general public nuanced and evolving matters normally reserved for scientific meetings.

"Now, it's being discussed on the nightly news," Dr. Walensky said.

The most recent confusion centers on how long people should isolate after testing positive for Covid-19 during the Omicron wave.

On Dec. 27, the CDC cut the number of days that it recommends people isolate after being infected with Covid-19 to five days from 10, and said people should wear a mask for the subsequent five days. But officials didn't recommend a test to see whether a person is still possibly infectious before leaving isolation.

After facing pushback, including from senior Biden administration officials, the CDC said on Jan. 4 that people can choose to take a test after five days to see if they are no longer positive to leave isolation but still fell short of recommending it.

Dr. Walensky said the decision not to originally include testing as part of the new isolation guidelines was because the available Covid-19 tests weren't authorized for clearing people from isolation.

Robert Redfield, the CDC director under former President Donald Trump, dismissed such an explanation because the CDC has embraced testing in schools.

"There was no reason for the policy makers at CDC to try to accommodate the lack of testing into their decision," said Dr. Redfield, who is now working with AM LLC, a consulting firm that advises schools on Covid-19 strategy.

The agency also recently faced criticism about its slow moves to update mask guidance as signs emerged the Omicron variant was spreading more rapidly and easily than previous variants.

On Jan. 14, the CDC suggested considering N95 and KN95 masks in some situations but stopped short of recommending that people wear higher-quality masks in high-risk situations.

Around the same time, the Biden administration announced it would be sending hundreds of millions of N95 masks to pharmacies, which some health experts said added to confusion.

On Tuesday, the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate's health committee released a bipartisan plan to revamp the CDC and improve the U.S. response to future pandemics. Under the draft legislation, the government would set up a task force to probe the U.S. response to the pandemic, improve public-health data collection and require the CDC director to be confirmed by the Senate.

Tom Frieden, who was CDC director from 2009 to 2017, said he hopes more regular briefings and including subject-matter experts will help restore confidence.

"Little by little they have to rebuild trust. It's not enough to get things right, you have to get things right and explain how you got things right and got the answer you did," said Dr. Frieden, who is now president of Resolve to Save Lives, a nonprofit dealing with epidemic preparedness.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Ukraine 'weekend army' trains: last defense
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-weekend-army-trains-as-last-defense-against-russia-11643452205?mod=hp_lead_pos9">https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-weekend-army-trains-as-last-defense-against-russia-11643452205?mod=hp_lead_pos9</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—In a forest one frigid recent morning, this country's last line of defense was training for the nightmare scenario of a Russian invasion reaching deep into the interior.</p> <p>An architect dove in the snow to practice taking cover. A 51-year-old mother of three toted an assault rifle as she pivoted to engage an enemy.</p> <p>Ukraine is fleshing out a territorial-defense force to take on the might of Russia's military if it breaches front-line defenses. The aim is to have a brigade of reservists in each of the country's regions, able to react quickly if the enemy blasts or sneaks its way through.</p> <p>"We are the weekend army," said Yuriy Bredak, a 33-year-old architect and father of two young children.</p> <p>The units aim to address a core problem Ukraine had when Russia sent an invasion force in 2014: Citizens were willing to fight, but weren't prepared or organized. One-third of respondents in a survey late last year said they were ready to take up arms if Russia invades.</p>



Eight years ago, thousands of poorly trained volunteers headed to the front to fight equally chaotic separatists and Russian fighters. Their derring-do helped liberate some towns, but when they faced covert Russian army units, they were crushed.

The Ukraine government is seeking to avoid that scenario this time by offering training and a structure for those who don't want to make a full-time commitment to the army. These reservists are valuable partly because Russia has a strategic advantage: It can attack from the north, south or east, or even stage armed attacks inside the country. Starting from last spring, the citizen-soldiers are activated if martial law is declared.

Territorial battalions were established in 2014, then were rolled into the army. They have now been re-established with a clear structure. Officials say they are adding large numbers of new recruits, aiming for a total reserve force of some 130,000.

"They will defend cities, villages, critical infrastructure, bridges, tunnels, roads, et cetera," Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said.

Joining requires a conversation with the local unit commander, medical checks, proof of no criminal record and signing a contract. Then training begins, including practical and theoretical classes.

Some participants of the recent training session were a little skeptical that the authorities have managed to rally as many volunteer fighters as the government projects.

Some of the 420,000 veterans of the eight-year war in Ukraine's east said they were waiting for more clarity about whether a conflict will break out before they commit, and prefer to band together with former comrades-in-arms over joining new groups.

Most have jobs and families that they are hoping not to abandon for the front line unless absolutely necessary.

Ukraine has been under threat so often, for so long, that many people have grown complacent about the need for urgent preparedness, particularly in recent years when the pandemic added to their daily struggles.

"Our military preparation is a problem—a lot of Ukrainians don't want to fight," said Yuri Boyko, who at age 68 is considered too old to fight, but attends the training as an adviser. "Life is busy and Ukrainians lost a lot of energy due to the long war, now Covid, [and] other issues."

"Much more needs to be done to be ready in case Russia attacks," he added.

Participants are a mix of veterans and ordinary folk energized by the desire to resist.

Marta Yuzkiv, 51 years old, said she is fired up by memories of Soviet rule of Ukraine, part of a long history of Moscow's domination of her country.

"I know what will happen if Russia comes here," she said, expressing particular concern that Russian forces will be holding military exercises at the start of February in Belarus, which has a border with Ukraine 75 miles from Kyiv.

"They have been trying to destroy Ukraine for a long time," she said. "They destroyed our churches, they stole our history.... It is something I don't want to repeat."

Ukraine is training younger reservists as well. About 180 male and female students from a local university stood at attention, side-by-side in snow some 3 inches thick, watching Ms. Yuzkiv and her fellow fighters conduct training exercises. Some grew fidgety as training dragged on in the cold, but they acknowledged that they recognize the threat to their country is real and they could be called to battle.

	<p>Military customs are difficult for civilians to get used to, especially the need to give and follow precise orders, said Denis Semyrog-Orlyk, a 46-year-old architect and reservist.</p> <p>He said he was alarmed by the news of the Russian military buildup, mostly because he recalled the destruction wrought by Russian forces in Syria.</p> <p>Mr. Semyrog-Orlyk also worried about how his family would cope if he has to go fight. He had kept a reserve of savings in case of war, but with the long conflict and economic troubles, he has already spent it. “It is like that for most people,” he said.</p> <p>Still, he said, Ukraine had become a different country in recent years, and people would be motivated by defending their homes against an invader.</p> <p>“In war the main thing is will to win,” said Mr. Semyrog-Orlyk. “The Russians don’t have the same motivation as we do.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 India protesters torch trains; jobless anger</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/28/protesters-railway-jobs-bihar/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/28/protesters-railway-jobs-bihar/</a>
GIST	<p>Angry job seekers torched trains and set tires alight in northeastern India this week out of frustration over widespread unemployment and what many applicants say is an unfair recruitment process in the country’s huge railway sector.</p> <p>The protests, in which young people obstructed rail traffic, were a violent expression of disillusionment with one of the world’s largest employers.</p> <p>Photos showed flames billowing from rail cars in the northeastern state of Bihar and hundreds of people walking across train tracks there. Protesters in Patna, the state capital, burned tires and blocked roads Friday in a strike called by student associations.</p> <p>The violent scenes have drawn attention to the joblessness that was worsening in India even before the <a href="#">coronavirus</a> pandemic, as young people — particularly educated ones — struggled to find employment. Many are left helping their families with unpaid domestic tasks as they prepare to compete for a relatively small number of government jobs, <a href="#">according to the BBC</a>.</p> <p>This week’s unrest began with small-scale demonstrations Monday, after young people seeking jobs in the government-run rail sector claimed that an entrance exam was being run unfairly.</p> <p>Millions of people had applied for about 150,000 jobs with the railway in Bihar and neighboring Uttar Pradesh state, <a href="#">applicants told the Reuters news agency</a>. Test results for different job categories showed the same names multiple times, and unsuccessful candidates say they feel unjustly excluded.</p> <p>“The recruitment process has not been transparent,” Ashutosh Singh, a protester in Bihar, told Reuters. “A number of the selected candidates had their names in various categories, which is very unfair.”</p> <p>This isn’t the first time the scramble for railway jobs has caused trouble. In 2018, India’s railway system announced a national recruitment drive for 63,000 of the most menial positions in its hierarchy — and <a href="#">19 million people applied</a>. Nearly all were college students or graduates, and some had master’s degrees.</p> <p>Railway positions are desirable because they can offer job security and a comparatively good salary, as well as perks such as free train travel. India’s railway sector employs more than 1.2 million people, according to Reuters.</p>

The unemployment rate in India, Asia's third-largest economy, stands at its highest in three decades, [the BBC reported](#), exceeding those of other emerging economies. The unemployment rate was nearly 8 percent in December, according to the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy, an independent think tank. In Bihar, it was double that.

With a jobs crisis in which desperate law school graduates have applied to become drivers, a railway job can seem like a golden ticket. And not receiving one has sparked acts of desperation.

Protesters this week lobbed stones at train cars and burned effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, [Al Jazeera reported](#). Rail services in Bihar were "severely" affected, NDTV news reported, after protesters clashed with security forces in the city of Gaya and set an empty train on fire. No injuries were reported in the blaze, [according to the Indian Express](#).

At least four people were arrested for alleged vandalism, and several others — including teachers at prominent institutes that coach students for the railway exams — have been arrested on accusations of inciting or taking part in violence, [according to the Hindustan Times](#).

Authorities in Patna told Reuters they have registered police complaints against 400 unnamed people and six coaching institutes.

The Railway Ministry said people found to have taken part in vandalism and destruction of public property could be banned from applying for railway jobs, Reuters reported. The government suspended the exam and said a committee had been formed to investigate candidates' concerns.

An alliance of opposition parties in Bihar expressed support for students' ongoing calls for protests, according to the Hindustan Times.

The police response to the protests has been criticized by activists and opposition politicians as heavy-handed. Security forces have used batons and tear gas against protesters. And in Sitamarhi, a city in northern Bihar, police fired into the air to disperse demonstrators, NDTV reported.

Demonstrations against alleged police brutality in Bihar also unfolded in New Delhi on Friday, led by the Indian Youth Congress and the left-leaning All India Students' Association.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 No Medicare coverage Covid at-home tests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/28/medicare-coronavirus-tests/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/28/medicare-coronavirus-tests/</a>
GIST	<p>When the Biden administration began requiring insurers to pay for at-home coronavirus tests, it left out a group especially vulnerable to the virus. Medicare, the federal insurance system with 64 million older or disabled Americans, was not included in the order, and the absence has triggered a fusillade of complaints.</p> <p>Members of Congress and advocates for older Americans have dispatched vehement letters to President Biden and his health secretary in recent days, urging the administration to alter Medicare's rules so that it will uniformly pay for the antigen tests consumers use at home. Meanwhile, thousands of people on Medicare have called a federal hotline about the tests, confused about what is covered.</p> <p>Under such pressure, officials inside the administration "are working around-the-clock, trying to figure out what is possible," said Meena Seshamani, Medicare director at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).</p> <p>Advocates contend that the agency, which has made it easier for people with Medicare to see doctors through telehealth during the pandemic, should be flexible about covering at-home tests, as well. But Medicare law does not make that simple. The fundamental obstacle is that the statute does not let the traditional version of Medicare — the insurance for nearly 6 in 10 people in the program — include over-</p>

the-counter health products, such as coronavirus rapid tests, among its benefits. Separate Medicare drug benefits are for prescriptions.

CMS is scrutinizing Medicare law, regulations and operations, trying to find a wrinkle that could make tests more accessible by expanding the program's coverage or some other approach, Seshamani said in an interview.

"We are looking hard at where there is a path forward," Seshamani said. She declined to predict whether a solution will be found or how quickly that could happen.

For now, most people with Medicare cannot buy at-home coronavirus tests from a pharmacy or order them online and be reimbursed for the cost.

They have certain options. If a patient has a doctor's order, the program pays for at-home tests or PCR tests, in which a lab determines the results. And CMS sent a mass email to everyone on Medicare encouraging them to go to a federal website, [CovidTests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov), to order up to four free tests per household, to be shipped by the U.S. Postal Service, as the [White House announced this month](#).

Medicare beneficiaries also may pick up free tests from about 20,000 community health centers and rural clinics to which the federal government has distributed rapid-testing kits.

The options are not enough, advocates for older Americans say.

"They can go to a testing site, when it may be dangerous for them to leave home. They may not have transportation," said Natalie Kean, a senior staff attorney for Justice in Aging, a legal group fighting poverty among older Americans. And most people on Medicare, she said, do not tend to rely on community clinics.

"Don't only make it available to those with commercial insurance. It's prejudicial," said Astrid Homan, who lives in Imperial, Mo., about 40 minutes south of St. Louis. Single and 62, Homan has been on Medicare for nine years because of disabilities. She has narcolepsy, a neurological disorder involving sleep, and another nerve disorder that causes pain in her right leg, making it difficult to stand.

Homan is fully vaccinated and boosted against the coronavirus. She doesn't go out much — mainly to the grocery store or the Walmart and to visit her mother, who will turn 90 next month, in a St. Louis retirement community. Homan was singing soprano in her church choir once it resumed, but the group decided it needed to stop again after Christmas as omicron spread.

She had a coronavirus test once, after attending a reception about a month ago for a friend's ordination at a different church. Only after the reception did she learn that someone there had the virus. She called her doctor, who wrote an order for her to get a PCR test at a lab. She was negative.

She would like to be able to take tests more often, especially if she has been out before seeing her mother. A pharmacy she called told her the price was \$79 for a combined coronavirus and flu test — more than she could afford. She lives on a \$1,600 monthly Social Security check and a \$600 ceiling on what federal disability rules let her earn each month from part-time work at home translating between English and her native Dutch. Sometimes, she has big bills for medicine.

Homan had heard that two public libraries were giving away at-home tests. Then she heard a county official on the radio, apologizing because the libraries were besieged with people who had hoped to get the limited supply.

This week, picking up something for her mother, she was standing in a checkout line next to a man who, she said was "coughing and hacking" while not wearing a mask. She wished she could take a test. "I'm not a nervous Nellie," she said, "but I need to take every precaution I can."

Such difficulty getting tests, advocates say, is particularly worrisome because older people are at high risk of becoming seriously ill or dying if infected with the coronavirus.

In the United States, 550,000 people 65 and older — the main age group for Medicare — have died of covid-19. They account for two-thirds of the coronavirus deaths, even though that age group represents 16.5 percent of the U.S. population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People 65 and older are hospitalized with covid at nearly three times the national average rate, CDC data show.

And paying for tests is burdensome for the many people on Medicare who have modest means. In 2019, the year before the pandemic, half of all people with Medicare had incomes below about \$30,000, while 1 in 4 had incomes below \$17,000, according to an analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a health-care policy organization.

“Older Americans are aware of what’s going on with covid. They’ve been hit hard by it. They know the statistics, and there’s demand for tests,” said Andrew Scholnick, a senior legislative representative for AARP, the large advocacy organization for Americans 50 and older.

“Even a \$12 test or \$24 for a two-pack may not seem like a lot, but if they are being asked to do it every time they see their grandkids or go to a community center, it adds up,” Scholnick said.

The complaints from people with Medicare — and their advocates and congressional representatives — have percolated since the president announced this month that, as of Jan. 15, insurers must cover as many as eight free at-home coronavirus tests a month for other people with private health plans, either paying up front or reimbursing them afterward.

While the discontent is recent, the coverage rules in Medicare have been the same since the Food and Drug Administration first approved a coronavirus antigen test on an emergency basis in spring 2020, a few months into the pandemic.

Medicare, created in the 1960s as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society, is now divided into two parts — a traditional version in which the program covers each medical service — and a newer version known as Medicare Advantage, in which people join private managed care plans. The rules for covering coronavirus tests differ.

It is traditional Medicare that fails to cover coronavirus tests, unless ordered by a doctor or other health-care practitioner.

Under Medicare Advantage, with almost 28 million beneficiaries, each company decides whether to cover at-home tests. The result is a patchwork.

Kaiser Permanente, enrolling 1.7 million Medicare members, provides that coverage “in keeping with our long-standing commitment to equity,” the company said in an email.

UnitedHealthcare has more than 7 million people on Medicare — the most of any private insurer. A UnitedHealthcare spokeswoman, Tracey Lempner, said 85 percent of its Medicare Advantage plans contain a benefit for over-the-counter products or services and that people “may be able to get” at-home tests through the benefit. The company’s website, however, says that Medicare Advantage members are not reimbursed for at-home coronavirus tests unless they have a doctor’s order. Asked about the discrepancy, Lempner said the tests would be covered without a doctor’s order up to an unspecified amount spelled out in individual plans.

Humana — with nearly 5 million members on Medicare, second highest among private insurers — did not reply to questions about its coverage rules. But in its own canvass of insurers, the Kaiser Family Foundation found that Humana does not cover at-home coronavirus tests for those members, even if their Medicare Advantage plan includes some over-the-counter benefits for other products.

Aetna, owned by CVS Health and enrolling nearly 3 million people on Medicare, says on its website that it does not cover at-home tests for those members. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, representing nonprofit and for-profit health plans around the country with nearly 4 million Medicare enrollees, said in an email that those companies “are assessing the feasibility of what could be done for Medicare Advantage members.”

In giving managed care plans a choice, and not covering tests in traditional Medicare, Congress has treated the program differently than the private insurance industry and other public insurance overseen by CMS. The first two coronavirus relief laws, adopted in March 2020, when the pandemic was new, require insurance carriers that sell group or individual plans to cover coronavirus tests and treatment, at no cost to consumers as long as the country remains under a federal public health emergency.

Last year, the American Rescue Plan law said that Medicaid, the public insurance for the poor, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, for youngsters from working-class families, must cover at-home coronavirus tests authorized by the FDA without any charge to the consumers.

Neither law mentioned Medicare.

“This should have been spelled out in the original legislation, which it was not,” said Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. (D-N.J.), who began to hear complaints from constituents with Medicare late last year. “This is a glaring hole in our national policy,” he said in an interview.

This month, after Biden announced that insurers must pay for as many as eight tests per person each month for Americans with private coverage, Pascrell and Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif.) sent the president a letter, urging the administration to “close the gap.” It was the first of several letters from Capitol Hill. They included a letter two days later to Health and Human Services Department Secretary Xavier Becerra from Reps. Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.) and Kim Schrier (D-Wash.) and a bipartisan group of more than 100 other House members, followed by another letter to Becerra this week from Sen. Debbie Stabenow (Mich.) that was co-signed by 18 fellow Senate Democrats.

Three days after Pascrell and Peters wrote, White House press secretary Jen Psaki was asked why Medicare does not always pay for the tests. Psaki replied that the administration is “exploring a range of options.” She did not elaborate.

In the interview, Seshamani, the Medicare director, said officials are examining the law governing the program to see how laboratory tests and diagnostics are defined. They are studying the program’s regulations to figure out whether an over-the-counter test could fit into any of the agency’s guidance.

And they are thinking through logistics, including whether the pharmacies and other places that consumers buy coronavirus tests are enrolled in the program as Medicare providers, whether there is a diagnosis or procedure code they could use to submit claims for reimbursement, and whether the right kind of claims form exists.

“If there’s anything we have learned from this virus, it is ... the pandemic is an ever-changing environment,” Seshamani said, “and we are evolving with it.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 Covid transmission has seasonal spikes?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/01/28/covid-seasons-temperature-humidity-study/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/01/28/covid-seasons-temperature-humidity-study/</a>
GIST	Covid-19 transmission may have seasonal spikes tied to temperature and humidity, increasing at different times of the year for different locations, a <a href="#">new study</a> in the <i>American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene</i> suggests.

Colder regions, such as the U.S. Northeast, may experience more cases during winter, while warmer regions, such as the southern United States, may see higher transmissions in the summer. More-temperate zones could experience two seasonal peaks.

“We think covid may be becoming [endemic](#), meaning that it will stay within the human population, but we will see spikes based on where we are in a particular geographic point,” said author Antar Jutla, a hydrologist at the University of Florida. “The severity of peaks will be defined by how colder the temperature is and how warmer the temperature is.”

Jutla and his colleagues found that [coronavirus](#) cases in 19 hot spots worldwide increased above and below certain temperature and humidity thresholds because of human behavior and the virus’s movement as an aerosol. Case numbers spiked when air temperatures dipped below 62 degrees (17 Celsius) or above 75 degrees (24 Celsius). The virus also tends to linger more in drier environments compared to humid ones.

“We need to basically design the intervention or mitigation strategies based on the environment in which we live,” Jutla said. “Regions like Florida, India, Africa — they are warm regions. ... They basically get hit by these waves, but at different times than what happens in the northern parts, the colder regions.”

Although case numbers could surge during extreme chills or heat waves, such temperatures typically need to persist for about a 14-day average, Jutla said. The team validated the data to December 2021, but characteristics could change with new mutations or new variants of the novel coronavirus.

Aerosol researcher and co-author Chang-Yu Wu explained that local humidity and temperature play vital roles in the size of the virus’s particles, which can influence its life span in the air. Drier atmospheres in colder regions will induce water evaporation from the particles, shrinking their size and allowing them to float in the air for longer periods. People also tend to seek shelter inside in colder environments and expose themselves to recirculated air that potentially contains the virus.

The air in humid, hotter environments contains more water, which can condense onto the virus particles, make them bigger and theoretically fall to the ground faster. Wu compares the particles to a rock in this case — the more mass, the faster it falls. At the same time, people often move inside to avoid the outdoor warmth and again expose themselves to recirculated air. Air conditioners also dry the inside air, creating an environment similar to that of winter for aerosols.

“Human behavior is a very important factor in the transmission,” said Wu, who also is a professor at the University of Florida. “It’s not just purely the physics or biology [of the virus] that dictates. ... It’s a combination of these.”

Fewer cases were detected between 62 and 75 degrees, a temperature range considered more tolerable for people to be outside.

“This study confirms the previous findings of seasonality with SARS-CoV-2 infection (low temperature and humidity),” Mohammad Sajadi, a professor at the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, wrote in an email. “It also adds to our knowledge about transmission in warmer temperatures.” Sajadi was not involved in the study.

He said more work is needed to further explore the use of air conditioning, stating that “the United States and India likely have different levels of usage, which was not accounted for in this study.”

“If anything, [the study] again shows us how complicated the issue of seasonality is,” Sajadi wrote.

Sajadi compared the findings to the seasonality, or climatic conditions, of influenza as well. For influenza infections, he said the stability of aerosols also occurs at two vastly different levels of humidity. The different patterns of seasonality depend on the geographic locale, too.

Others found the climate-covid relationships in different locations plausible as well.



“I like that the study points out that climate-covid relationships will differ by region,” said Ben Zaitchik, a co-chair of a covid-19 research task team at World Meteorological Organization. Zaitchik, who commented by email, was not involved in the study. “We found something similar [in a study](#) ... and I think it’s important to emphasize,” he wrote.

He also stressed that linking climate to covid risk is an evolving field of research. Several studies with other climate-covid mechanisms have been published in the past few months, including one discussing the [challenges of studying](#) such an area.

It is important to remember that these are only one driver of risk, Zaitchik wrote. “All evidence is that it has been a [secondary driver](#) up to this point in the pandemic. It might become more important as covid becomes endemic and settles into a seasonally locked pattern — which many expect that it will.”

Considering the virus’s environmental and socioeconomic influences, Jutla and colleagues also created a model to predict the risk of covid weekly in the United States.

The model, which is in the beta phase, includes air temperature, humidity, population density, economic stability (income), age, diversity, housing, vaccination data sets and other factors. The predictive model builds on work by Jutla and other co-authors, who previously demonstrated how cholera outbreaks are tied to environmental factors such as air temperature and salinity.

“Social behavioral sciences need to be strongly intertwined with the natural sciences,” said co-author Rita Colwell, a biologist at the University of Maryland who helped uncover the role the environment plays in cholera transmission. “The intersection of the physical environment and human behavior in warm and cold regions is exemplified in the covid case reports.”

The model shows about 80 to 90 percent accuracy nationwide (validated on a county-level scale), although Zaitchik said it is important to see the model in a peer-reviewed form, especially because of its novelty. “There hasn’t been any robust demonstration of a model like that for covid-19 risk prediction,” he said.

Overall, the researchers stressed that proper ventilation and filtration, such as masks, are among the most important measures for preventing transmission of the disease. Air sampling studies have repeatedly shown that excellent ventilation and filtration can reduce covid case loads, even in larger, relatively crowded places such as gyms.

“For me, the biggest takeaway is the need to focus on the built environment,” Zaitchik wrote. “It’s not simply a matter of ‘is it cold out’; it’s a matter of whether those cold temperatures are leading you to crowd indoors, reduce ventilation, use climate controls that result in low indoor humidity, etc.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 Olympic sponsors ‘China is an exception’
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/business/olympic-sponsors-china-beijing.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/business/olympic-sponsors-china-beijing.html</a>
GIST	<p>At the bottom of the slope where snowboarders will compete in the 2022 Beijing Olympics, an electronic sign cycles through ads for companies like Samsung and Audi. Coca-Cola’s cans are adorned with Olympic rings. Procter &amp; Gamble has opened a beauty salon in the Olympic Village. Visa is the event’s official credit card.</p> <p>President Biden and a handful of other Western leaders may have declared a “<a href="#">diplomatic boycott</a>” of the Winter Games, which begin next week, but some of the world’s most famous brands will still be there.</p> <p>The prominence of these multinational companies, many of them American, has taken the political sting out of the efforts by Mr. Biden and other leaders to punish China for its human rights abuses, including a campaign of repression in the western region of Xinjiang that the State Department has <a href="#">declared a genocide</a>.</p>

The Olympic sponsorship reflects the stark choice facing multinational companies working in the country: Jeopardize access to an increasingly sensitive China, or deal with the reputational risk associated with doing business there. When it comes to the Beijing Olympics, the decision has been clear.

While the sponsors have faced [protests](#) by human rights activists in several countries, they have largely brushed them aside, choosing instead to keep China, and its emerging class of nationalistic consumers, happy.

The companies argue that the Olympics are not political, and that they have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on deals that span multiple Games, not just Beijing's. Collectively, the top 13 Olympic sponsors have contracts with the International Olympic Committee that add up to more than \$1 billion.

"They just seem to be proceeding as normal," said Mandie McKeown, executive director of the [International Tibet Network](#), a group that helped to organize protests by more than 200 rights groups calling for a boycott of the Olympics. "It's literally like they've got their heads in the sand."

For companies, though, the risks of [angering Chinese consumers](#) by criticizing China's policies are high. Armies of patriotic voices on Chinese social media have furiously denounced foreign brands for perceived slights, vitriol often amplified by the government and official state media.

Adidas, Nike and other fashion companies faced nationwide boycotts in China after they [expressed concerns](#) about reports of forced labor in Xinjiang, the region where the Communist Party has forced millions of Uyghur Muslims into mass detention and re-education camps. When the fashion retailer H&M pledged to stop buying cotton from Xinjiang, a [boycott](#) by Chinese consumers cost it around [\\$74 million in lost sales](#) over one quarter.

Even one of the top Olympic sponsors, Intel, [faced a backlash](#) last month after the company posted a letter calling on international suppliers to avoid sourcing products from Xinjiang. In the face of the fury, Intel [rewrote the letter](#) within days to remove the reference to Xinjiang.

"The space to please both sides has evaporated," said Jude Blanchette, a scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "When choosing who to upset, it's either a bad week or two of press in the U.S. versus a very real and justified fear that you'll lose market access in China."

Top sponsors have sidestepped questions, [at times awkwardly](#), about whether their support effectively whitewashes the Communist Party's authoritarian rule. The Olympics, executives argue, should not be politicized, pointing to the [Olympic Charter](#), which says as much, despite a long history of political intrigue surrounding the Games.

Only four major sponsors — Omega, Intel, Airbnb and Procter & Gamble — responded to requests for comment. Omega, the official timekeeper and data handler of the Olympic Games, said that since it started its partnership with the Olympic Games in 1932, "it has been our policy not to get involved in certain political issues because it would not advance the cause of sport in which our commitment lies."

Airbnb and Procter & Gamble said they were focused on individual athletes and emphasized their commitment to each Olympics Games rather than Beijing, specifically. A representative at Intel said the company would "continue to ensure that our global sourcing complies with applicable laws and regulations in the U.S. and in other jurisdictions where we operate."

"Ski and sport have no business in politics," said Justin Downes, president of Axis Leisure Management, a hospitality company and contractor that is working with the Canadian Olympic Committee and others to help with logistics and supplies.

Almost all the Olympic sponsors have codes of ethics or a corporate social responsibility pledge to honor human rights, but these Games have tested how far they will go to speak out against widely recognized violations.

In China, those violations have included the crackdown in Xinjiang, as well as the continuing repression of Tibet, the erosion of political freedoms in Hong Kong and the threats to assert China's territorial claim over Taiwan.

Mr. Downes has signed contracts with Olympics venues to ensure that the people he employs do not raise politically sensitive topics. If any member of his staff, which includes medical responders, makes a political statement on subjects like Xinjiang, Mr. Downes could be liable, he said.

"We are told not to disclose on certain topics or post pictures on social media," Mr. Downes said of the contracts. "They don't want people showing up and making a statement. It's common sense."

China's critics say the sponsors have associated themselves with an event that could tarnish their brands. Some have compared these Games to the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, which Nazi Germany used to showcase Hitler's fascist regime.

"We always repeated these words, 'Never again'," said Tenzyn Zöchbauer, an ethnic Tibetan who has joined protests in Germany against Allianz, the insurance and financial services giant that is also a top Olympic sponsor. "At least genocide should be a red line," she added, referring to China's crackdown in Xinjiang.

For many international companies, however, the Winter Olympics are an opportunity to capture the attention of more than a billion consumers around the world, as well as inside China's huge consumer market.

Beyond the top sponsors, numerous international companies have promoted their products in Olympic-themed campaigns. In one shopping center in Beijing, Adidas has erected a ski slope with skiing mannequins. At one Pizza Hut, the official panda mascot for the Games waves from a window display.

A skiing Bing Dwen Dwen, as the panda is known in China, is also splashed across KFC boxes.

The prominence of such advertising campaigns risks unwanted attention in the United States.

Executives from Coca-Cola, Airbnb, Intel, Procter & Gamble and Visa were [hauled](#) in front of Congress in July and accused of putting profits before ethics with their Olympics sponsorships. They have all been assailed in public letters. Lawmakers in the United States and in Europe have called them out for participating.

Even so, the issue of human rights violations in China has not generated enough protests to threaten the profits of multinational companies, while the angry Chinese consumers have fueled painful boycotts.

"Let's be honest — nobody, nobody cares about what's happening to the Uyghurs, OK?" Chamath Palihapitiya, the billionaire investor and part-owner of the National Basketball Association's Golden State Warriors, [said](#) this month. Mr. Palihapitiya was criticized for the remark, and the Warriors later [played down](#) his involvement with the team.

Of the top Olympic sponsors, only Allianz is known to have met with activists calling for a boycott of the Games. The company has not spoken out, however. A protest last week at the doors of its office in Berlin drew only seven people.

Many of the main sponsors appear to be hoping they get through the Olympics without drawing too much attention.

Activists say the sponsors and the International Olympic Committee have the economic leverage to influence the Chinese authorities but are too timid to wield it.

	<p>“If any other government in the world did what the Chinese are doing in Xinjiang or even in Hong Kong, a lot of companies would just pull up stakes,” said Michael Posner, a former State Department official who is now at New York University’s Stern School of Business.</p> <p>He cited decisions by companies to divest in places like Myanmar and Ethiopia, as well as the campaigns to boycott South Africa when its apartheid government sent all-white teams to the Olympics.</p> <p>“China is an exception,” he said. “It’s just so big, both as a market and a manufacturing juggernaut, that companies feel they can’t afford to get in the cross hairs of the government, so they just keep their mouths shut.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Separatists ambush, kill 10 Pakistan troops</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/asia/separatists-pakistani-soldiers.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/asia/separatists-pakistani-soldiers.html</a>
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — The assault on a military post in a remote southwestern district lasted for several hours. Dozens of attackers, belonging to a Baluch separatist group, heavily armed with rocket launchers and sophisticated weapons, outnumbered the Pakistani soldiers. A heavy gunfight killed 10 Pakistani soldiers and one attacker, and the rest managed to escape, officials said.</p> <p>The ambush, on Tuesday evening, was one of the deadliest on Pakistani soldiers in recent years and comes at a time of heightened unrest. The country’s security forces were already in a state of alert after a string of terrorist attacks this month — and officials said they are bracing for more attacks in the coming months as militant groups extend their reach and scale of attacks.</p> <p>The Pakistani military officially confirmed the Baluchistan attack Thursday evening, a day after it tried to downplay the incident and restricted the local news media from reporting on it. Military officials stressed that they were still trying to get details of the attack, which happened in Kech, a remote mountainous district of southwestern Baluchistan, a natural gas and mineral-rich province where an insurgency has simmered for decades.</p> <p>In a statement, the military said that three people had been arrested in a clearing operation, and it was still looking for other attackers. “Armed forces are determined to eliminate terrorists from our soil no matter what the cost,” the military said.</p> <p>On Friday, Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned the attack. “We are resolute in our commitment to rid Pakistan of all forms of terrorism,” Mr. Khan <a href="#">said on Twitter</a>.</p> <p>The surge in violence reflects the formidable challenge Pakistan faces in curbing not only the Baluch insurgency but also the resurgent Taliban in the country’s northwest. Officials say the Pakistani Taliban have now unilaterally scrapped a cease-fire <a href="#">announced earlier in November</a>, and attempts to pressure the Afghan Taliban to influence the Pakistani movement to give up arms have remained futile.</p> <p>Baluchistan Liberation Front, a separatist group, claimed the responsibility soon after the attack Tuesday evening and vowed that it would continue the attacks against the Pakistani military. It released pictures of its killed member and what it said was video footage of the assault; attackers slowly moving in on a military post, as explosions echoed and flashes of fire emanated from soldiers holed up in a bunker. Later, the Pakistani military said the video was inauthentic.</p> <p>Pakistani security officials said there were at least 35 attackers, who conducted the ambush on the post in a coordinated manner from different directions. The military post — at Sibdan, a remote, barren location in Kech district — was being used primarily for surveillance purposes.</p> <p>The assault on the military post came shortly after a bombing rocked a busy shopping district in the eastern city of Lahore, considered to be the cultural and political capital of Pakistan. On Jan. 20, three people were killed while at least 25 others were wounded in the explosion, which officials said was caused</p>

by a timed device attached to a motorcycle. A newly formed Baluch separatist group claimed responsibility for the Lahore attack.

While the two attacks might be coincidental, the spike in violence comes amid [warnings by Baluch separatists](#) that Chinese investments are not safe in Pakistan. Pakistan has been a showcase for China's huge international development program, the Belt and Road Initiative, in recent years. China is estimated to have spent some \$62 billion on those projects in Pakistan, mostly to build a transportation corridor through Baluchistan to a new Chinese-operated deepwater port in the [Pakistani town of Gwadar](#).

Analysts said that while the recent attacks targeted security forces and others, the real aim was elsewhere.

"CPEC remains the target," said Saleem Qamar Butt, a retired senior military officer, and Islamabad-based defense analyst, referring to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. "The hostile intelligence agencies have started pumping money to boost Baluch proxies," he said.

The army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa met with Mr. Khan Wednesday and his senior commanders a day later as the military mulls reprisals amid growing calls from action against the insurgents.

Security officials say they will step up their pursuit of the insurgents, and intelligence-based operations against the facilitators in the region have already started.

Pakistani officials have long maintained that India funds and supports the Baluch insurgency, which India denies. The Baluch separatists are also believed to have bases inside Iran, which neighbors Baluchistan Province.

"BLF, for years, has used Iran's soil for mounting attacks in southwest Balochistan," Ejaz Haider, a defense and political analyst, [said on Twitter](#), referring to the Baluchistan Liberation Front. "Why are we afraid of that discussion?" he added.

"Afghanistan and Iran soils both serve as the launchpads for the terrorists," Mr. Butt, the defense analyst, said, adding that government dithering could further embolden the separatist groups.

"We need to strike them in their bases, both at home and abroad," he said.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Pentagon: Russia capable Ukraine invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/politics/russia-ukraine-invasion-pentagon.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/politics/russia-ukraine-invasion-pentagon.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has deployed the troops and military hardware needed to invade all of Ukraine, the Pentagon's top leaders said on Friday, as senior Defense Department officials warned that the tense standoff was leading the United States, its NATO allies and Russia into uncharted territory.</p> <p>Russia has assembled more than 100,000 troops <a href="#">at Ukraine's borders</a>, the officials said, publicly confirming for the first time what intelligence analysts have described for weeks. Those troops, Pentagon officials said, have the ability to <a href="#">move throughout Ukraine</a>, far beyond an incursion into only the border regions.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III described an array of Russian infantry troops, artillery and rockets assembled at the Ukrainian border, which he said "far and away exceeds what we would typically see them do for exercises."</p> <p>Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was more blunt: "I think you'd have to go back quite a while to the Cold War days to see something of this magnitude."</p>

Their comments came as President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called for calm, saying that talk of an invasion could cause panic and destabilize his country's economy. But the Pentagon leaders, speaking at a news conference that was dominated by the unfolding crisis, presented a grim picture, and Defense Department officials and Russia experts have privately warned that a Russian invasion has the potential to start a conflict between Moscow and the West that could quickly escalate.

Even if NATO is not drawn into a wider conflict, invading Ukraine could bring carnage, General Milley warned. "Given the type of forces that are arrayed," he said, referring to the Russian troops and hardware at the border, "if that was unleashed on Ukraine, it would be significant, very significant, and it would result in a significant amount of casualties."

He added: "You can imagine what that might look like in dense urban areas, along roads and so on and so forth. It would be horrific. It would be terrible. And it's not necessary. And we think a diplomatic outcome is the way to go here."

U.S. officials estimate that 35,000 Americans are in Ukraine, including 7,000 people who have registered with the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, the capital. While the State Department has advised Americans to leave the country and has ordered family members of embassy personnel to depart, Pentagon officials know well from their experience in Afghanistan over the summer that American citizens often do not heed advice to leave.

Mr. Austin did not rule out the possibility that U.S. troops might be sent to Ukraine to evacuate Americans if Russia invades and there is combat in the streets of Kyiv. "Whatever task the United States military is called upon to accomplish, we will be prepared to do it," he said when asked if U.S. troops would enter Ukraine to evacuate Americans.

But that is exactly the type of situation that officials fear could lead to a potential miscalculation and escalation.

"When there's war, everything changes," Michael A. McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia, said in an interview. "Accidents can happen and planes can get shot down. Americans in Ukraine could get killed. All those kinds of scenarios could happen, and then we're in a different world."

Mr. Austin has put [8,500 U.S. troops on high alert](#) for possible deployment to Eastern Europe, where most of them would join a NATO rapid response team of 30,000 to 40,000 troops. And while President Biden has made clear that he has no intention of deploying U.S. troops to Ukraine to help fend off an invasion, he indicated this week that he might separately send additional troops to Eastern European allies that are worried about Russian advances.

Mr. Biden said on Friday that he intended to move U.S. troops to Eastern Europe "in the near term," adding that "not a lot" would be deployed.

The troops on high alert include elements from the 82nd Airborne out of Fort Bragg, N.C.; the 101st Airborne out of Fort Campbell, Ky.; and the Fourth Infantry Division out of Fort Carson, Colo., as well as from bases in Arizona, Texas, Washington State, Louisiana, Georgia and Ohio.

Ukraine is not a member of NATO, so the United States has no treaty obligation to defend it. But countries in the alliance's so-called eastern flank — former Soviet satellites and the Baltic nations — are concerned that they could be next on Mr. Putin's list. The purpose of the American troops, if deployed, would be to reassure those NATO allies that while the United States might decline to enter a war with Russia over Ukraine, it will not hesitate to do so if a NATO member is attacked.

There are also signs that Russia and its proxies are stirring up discord and confusion far from Ukraine to distract the United States and its European partners.



	<p>Russian surveillance aircraft this week flew near Al Tanf, a military outpost in Syria near the Jordanian border where some 200 American troops are training allied Syrian militia members. Two Russian warships are in the Red Sea waiting to steam into the eastern Mediterranean, where an American aircraft carrier is conducting a naval exercise.</p> <p>In West Africa's Sahel region, supporters of a military coup in Burkina Faso took to the streets this week waving Russian flags, showing their desire to pivot away from France, the former colonial power, and toward Moscow.</p> <p>French officials suggested that the Russian Embassy may have paid the supporters to wave flags, as the Russians have done in Mali, a country north of Burkina Faso that recently signed a deal to bring in several hundred Russian mercenaries to help combat a growing Islamist insurgency there. France and several other European countries operating in Mali have strenuously opposed the country's plan to recruit mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-linked firm.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Army vets win \$110M 3M earplug lawsuit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/veterans-earplugs-3m-lawsuit.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/veterans-earplugs-3m-lawsuit.html</a>
GIST	<p>A federal jury on Thursday awarded \$110 million to two U.S. Army veterans who said they had hearing damage because of combat earplugs produced by the multinational manufacturer 3M.</p> <p>It is the latest decision in a network of hundreds of thousands of lawsuits that accuse 3M of knowingly selling defective earplugs to the military. 3M has maintained that the since-discontinued product, which was marketed as Combat Arms earplugs, Version 2, was effective and safe to use.</p> <p>The decision on Thursday represented the largest sum awarded to date in the earplug litigation against 3M. The two veterans, Ronald Sloan and William Wayman, were each awarded \$15 million in compensatory damages and \$40 million in punitive damages by a jury in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida.</p> <p>Bryan F. Aylstock, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said both men had tinnitus and hearing loss that interfered with their daily lives.</p> <p>"While they are certainly pleased with the verdict and happy that the jury saw through the defenses that 3M tried to put forth, they have to go back to their lives living with these permanent conditions that simply will never go away and will only get worse," Mr. Aylstock said.</p> <p>Mr. Sloan and Mr. Wayman both used the earplugs during training and their deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to their lawyers. Mr. Sloan served in the Army from 1994 to 2015, and Mr. Wayman served from 1997 to 2017.</p> <p>Mr. Aylstock said 3M needlessly put soldiers in harm's way.</p> <p>"It's not as though this was a paper clip or a Post-it note, where if it doesn't work, it's not a huge deal," Mr. Aylstock said. "They knew this was going to cause permanent damage to our soldiers."</p> <p>3M said in an emailed statement that it would appeal the jury's decision and noted that the company had won the previous two cases in the earplugs litigation.</p> <p>"While we are disappointed with the verdicts, the overall mixed record in the bellwether process thus far shows that plaintiffs face significant challenges in this litigation and each case must be considered on its own facts and circumstances," the statement said.</p> <p>Aearo Technologies, a subsidiary of 3M, developed the product and was also a defendant in the case.</p>



	<p>Nearly 300,000 service members and civilians are involved with the earplug litigation, which is one of the largest mass torts in U.S. history.</p> <p>In the 10 other cases that have been decided, 3M won five cases and the plaintiffs won five cases. Nine of the 14 service members who were plaintiffs in the successful lawsuits were awarded \$1.7 million to \$22.5 million each.</p> <p>Five other trial dates are set for this year. The next trial is scheduled to take place in Pensacola, Fla., in March.</p> <p>The litigation was spurred in part by a whistle-blower lawsuit that alleged that 3M sold defective earplugs to the military in violation of the False Claims Act. In 2018, 3M agreed to pay \$9.1 million in a settlement with the Department of Justice in response to the lawsuit. The settlement did not determine liability.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 US blocks Egypt aid; human rights concern</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/politics/egypt-us-human-rights.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/politics/egypt-us-human-rights.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Citing human rights concerns, the United States will not give Egypt \$130 million in annual security assistance, officials said on Friday, even as the Biden administration continues to approve billions of dollars in military sales to the Middle Eastern ally.</p> <p>The financial aid <a href="#">was temporarily frozen in the fall</a> as the State Department demanded that Egypt do more to protect the rights of political critics, journalists, women and members of civil society. It was the first time that a secretary of state did not issue a formal national security waiver to provide the aid, and was aimed at pressuring officials in Cairo to release political prisoners and stop persecuting critics.</p> <p>Since then, Egypt has failed to convince the Biden administration that steps the country has taken were enough to protect human rights — and, in turn, preserve the funding.</p> <p>“It sends the important message abroad that we will back up our commitment to human rights with action, and gone are the days where dictators receive blank checks from America,” Senator Christopher S. Murphy, Democrat of Connecticut, said in a statement on Friday.</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken <a href="#">spoke by phone with</a> Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry of Egypt on Thursday, but the State Department had not made a final decision on whether to withhold the assistance as of Friday afternoon, said Jalina Porter, a department spokeswoman. But other department officials, who spoke to reporters on condition that they not be named in keeping with department protocols, said Mr. Blinken was expected to divert the funding to other national security priorities — and away from Egypt.</p> <p>The Egyptian government has not officially responded. President Donald J. Trump also <a href="#">froze military aid to Egypt</a> in 2017, but released it the following year.</p> <p>Mr. Murphy said the Biden administration had outlined a “list of narrow and wholly achievable human rights conditions” for Egypt to meet to receive the financial assistance before a Jan. 31 deadline. Other officials said the precise requirements were classified but included the <a href="#">overturning of guidelines</a> that had allowed for the unjust detention and harassment of Egyptian and foreign human rights activists.</p> <p>An annual <a href="#">State Department report on Egypt’s human rights record</a>, released in March, cited numerous examples of abuse by government security forces, including extrajudicial killings, abductions and torture. It also found that free and political speech was inhibited, including by restricting the news media, and that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people were targeted with violence.</p> <p>According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Egypt has consistently ranked among the world’s top jailers of journalists since President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected in 2014.</p>

Last fall, Mr. el-Sisi announced a new strategy to protect human rights and in the months since has released some political prisoners.

But activists and American officials said it did not go far enough.

In November, five Egyptian activists and politicians, including a former member of Parliament, were sentenced from three to five years in prison on charges of spreading false news and using their social media accounts to undermine national security.

In December, an Egyptian court sentenced three prominent human rights figures to several years in prison, also on charges of spreading false news.

“Of course the Egyptian government is saying things have improved, but the reality on the ground is dark and vicious,” said Gamal Eid, who ran an independent human rights organization in Egypt for 18 years before announcing this month that he would end its operations, citing security threats and police intimidation.

Mr. Eid, who was the executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, is embroiled in a criminal case against a number of nongovernmental organizations, and dozens of their members, that the authorities have accused of receiving foreign funding illegally. He has been banned from travel since 2016, and his assets have been frozen. Two of his team members, a lawyer and a researcher, are in jail.

The blocked funding is just a fraction of an estimated \$1.3 billion in aid the United States generally gives Egypt each year. Only a small amount of the assistance is conditioned on the country’s human rights record, under requirements set by Congress, and officials at the State Department said \$130 million was the maximum they could withhold in a single fiscal year.

But Egypt has continued to buy billions of dollars worth of military airplanes, ships and other equipment — including \$2.5 billion in C-130 cargo jets and radar that was announced this week alone.

The State Department officials described military sales as unrelated to the financial assistance that the United States provides Egypt annually. They also said the military equipment most recently sold to Cairo would further American security interests; the jets, in particular, would replace older planes Egypt had used to distribute humanitarian aid and coronavirus relief supplies.

“Our relationship with Egypt is multifaceted, and Egypt is a valuable partner across many fronts,” said Ned Price, the State Department spokesman. “The United States remains committed to engaging with Egypt on human rights issues.”

After taking office a year ago, the Biden administration issued a statement promising to put “human rights at the center of U.S. foreign policy.” It has since sought to walk a line between enforcing American standards of human rights and alienating strategically located foreign partners who do not adhere to those standards.

Egypt is a key partner with the United States in negotiating peace between Israel and Hamas, and providing stability in the Gaza Strip. But it also was not invited to a meeting of more than 100 countries that President Biden hosted in December to rally the world’s democracies against authoritarian governments.

Amr Magdi, a senior Middle East researcher at Human Rights Watch, said the recent military sales showed that the Biden administration was still willing to provide diplomatic and military support to Mr. el-Sisi, despite the abuses.

“That sends a signal to the Egyptian government that they can definitely get what they want with time, and that they don’t really have to meet any concrete benchmarks, and that the release of just a few activists can

	serve as the fig leaf to the Biden administration and others who want to continue doing business as usual,” Mr. Magdi said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Pittsburgh bridge collapses; injuries</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/pittsburgh-bridge-collapse-biden.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/us/pittsburgh-bridge-collapse-biden.html</a>
GIST	<p>PITTSBURGH — In the City of Bridges, it was not a standout. The bridge, four lanes of Forbes Avenue raised on a steel frame over a picturesque wooded ravine, carried traffic to and from the neighborhoods on the city’s East End. It was around 50 years old and, according to inspectors, in poor condition, but even by these measures was not particularly exceptional in Pittsburgh.</p> <p>Then on Friday morning, hours before President Biden was scheduled to visit the city to discuss the condition of the country’s infrastructure, the bridge collapsed into the snowy hollow below. At least 10 people were injured, four of them seriously enough to require hospital attention, according to a hospital spokeswoman. But no one was killed and officials said that none of the injuries were life-threatening.</p> <p>For a bridge that is routinely crowded with traffic in morning and evening rush hours, this was especially fortunate. The timing of the collapse — around 6:45 a.m. — and the fact that city schools were opening two hours late because of snow were partially to thank for that.</p> <p>When the bridge fell, said Darryl Jones, the Pittsburgh fire chief, only four cars and a bus — carrying a driver and two passengers — were on it. He described a challenging rescue operation, with emergency workers rappelling down into the snowy ravine and then setting up “a daisy chain with hands just grabbing people and pulling them up.” The collapse ruptured a gas line that was quickly shut off, Chief Jones said, but it left a pungent odor lingering in the area throughout the morning.</p> <p>Officials said the cause of the collapse was not yet known, though engineers and officials alike blamed the disaster on years of deferred maintenance. The National Transportation Safety Board announced it was sending a team of investigators.</p> <p>That it fell on the day of Mr. Biden’s visit was an unhappy coincidence that one local official called “surreal.” When the presidential motorcade arrived in the early afternoon, it made a stop at one end of the fallen bridge, where officials and rescue workers were gathered in the snow looking down at the wreckage.</p> <p>In his remarks several hours later, Mr. Biden cited the bridge collapse as clear proof of why his administration’s \$1 trillion infrastructure plan was urgently needed.</p> <p>“There are another 3,300 bridges here in Pennsylvania, some of which are just as old and in just as decrepit condition as that bridge was,” he said, pledging that “we’re going to rebuild that bridge, along with thousands of other bridges in Pennsylvania and across the country.”</p> <p>But with such a backlog of needed repairs, officials acknowledge that the \$1.6 billion that the plan directs to Pennsylvania’s bridges would just be a start.</p> <p>Nationally, according to the <a href="#">latest infrastructure report card</a> prepared by the American Society of Civil Engineers, 42 percent of bridges are more than a half century old, and nearly 8 percent of them — more than 45,000 bridges — are considered “structurally deficient.” Pennsylvania’s bridges are even older than the national average, and the state <a href="#">has more than double the average</a> of bridges rated in poor condition, which is one grade above failing.</p> <p>Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh sits, has 176 bridges with a poor rating, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. An analysis of 2020 National Bridge Inventory data undertaken by Daniel Armanios, a professor of major program management at the University of Oxford, and Cari Gandy, a doctoral student at Carnegie Mellon University, says the estimated cost of addressing the structural issues of Pittsburgh’s bridges alone would come to \$458 million.</p>

“No question it’s going to help, but won’t get us all the way there,” said Ed Gainey, who became mayor less than a month ago. “But, you know, at least we got something.” Mr. Gainey said the collapse of the bridge, which was owned by the city, “absolutely shifts the focus” to tackling infrastructure issues.

State Senator Jay Costa, whose district includes the bridge collapse, said a broad assessment of bridges and other infrastructure in the county needed to be conducted as soon as possible.

“It hasn’t been done, I believe, for quite a while,” he said. With routine state and city inspections, there was a general sense of what needed repair, he added, but without a systemwide look, it was hard to know what projects were most urgent.

Pittsburgh alone is home to nearly 450 bridges, dozens of them in serious need of repair and refurbishment. “This was not a high-priority bridge,” Mr. Costa said in a phone interview not far from where the bridge lay in pieces in the ravine.

Jonathan Shimko, past president of the Pittsburgh branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers, said the collapse was likely caused by years of deferred maintenance, rather than a discrete event. Because of “the out-of-sight, out-of-mind nature of infrastructure,” Mr. Shimko said, bridges and other infrastructure “typically don’t get a lot of attention until something catastrophic like this happens.”

The nearly 450-foot bridge, which was [lauded by the American Institute of Steel Construction](#) in 1974 for its “sense of logic and beauty,” had seen better days. [In inspection reports](#) from 2011 through 2017 it was rated in “poor” condition. The mayor said the bridge was last inspected by the city in September.

It carried around 14,500 vehicles each day, according to inspection reports, as the main artery through the middle of Frick Park, a 644-acre expanse of wooded hills named for Henry Clay Frick, one of the city’s most famous — and most ruthless — steel magnates.

At roughly 50 years old, it was “in the range of where you would see the useful life of the bridge start to decline,” said Kevin Heaslip, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech.

With bridge construction in the United States at its height in the 1960s and ’70s, many bridges are now reaching middle age. But with limited funds, state and local transportation departments tend to put off necessary maintenance.

“Deferring of maintenance over time ends up adding up,” Mr. Heaslip said. “And that’s kind of what we saw here.”

Rich Fitzgerald, the Allegheny County executive, echoed the urgent need for the funding in the infrastructure bill, pointing out that just four years ago, part of a major thoroughfare not far away had collapsed in a landslide.

“We’ve been holding things off and waiting and pushing, past the limits sometimes unfortunately, and delaying these things that needed to be done because the money just wasn’t there,” he said.

Mr. Fitzgerald added: “So we got to fix these things. Because, you know, one of these days, our luck’s going to run out.”

The condition of the bridge was not lost on many of the Pittsburghers who regularly walk and jog beneath its rusted span in the trails that wind along Fern Hollow Creek. Greg Kochanski, a software engineer, was walking his dog under the bridge about three years ago when he noticed that one of the X beams that stabilized the bridge was so rusted that it had disconnected from the column to which it had been attached.

He reported this to the city in a tweet and, several weeks later, he said, noticed that the rusted beam had been removed.

	“I wasn’t really expecting it to collapse,” Mr. Kochanski said on Friday morning. “But no, it didn’t surprise me.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Ukraine Belarus border largely undefended</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/europe/russia-troops-belarus-border-ukraine.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/europe/russia-troops-belarus-border-ukraine.html</a>
GIST	<p>NOVI YARYLOVYCHI BORDER CROSSING, Ukraine — On the other side of this border in northern Ukraine, not visible through the thick pine and birch forests that crowd the E-95 highway but noticeable to passing truckers, a force is gathering in Belarus more potent than anything seen in the country since the fall of the Soviet Union, officials and military analysts say.</p> <p>Russia has deployed tanks and artillery, fighter jets and helicopters, advanced rocket systems and troops by the thousands all across Belarus, augmenting a fighting force that already envelopes Ukraine like a horseshoe on three sides. Russia says the troops have deployed for military exercises scheduled to commence next month, but the buildup in Belarus could presage an attack from a new vector, one in proximity to Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv.</p> <p>With much of Ukraine’s military might concentrated in the country’s east — where a war with Russian-backed separatists has raged for eight years — military analysts and Ukraine’s own generals say it will be difficult for the country to muster the forces necessary to defend its northern border.</p> <p>“As a result of Russia taking control over Belarus, 1,070 kilometers of our border with Belarus became a threat,” said Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine’s defense minister, referring to a distance of about 665 miles. “This is not a threat from Belarus — Ukraine has a very warm attitude toward the Belarusian people — but a threat from Russia moving through Belarus.”</p> <p>The Novi Yarylovychi border crossing is a fast, 140-mile drive straight from the Belarus border south to Kyiv on a highway that is mostly freshly paved thanks to efforts by President Volodymyr Zelensky to address the poor state of Ukrainian roads. It would be an easy ride for any Russian tank driver so long as Russian forces take out Ukrainian air power and artillery first, and the Javelin anti-tank missiles provided to the Ukrainian military by the United States stay deployed in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>On the Ukrainian side of the border, preparations to repel a potential military incursion are largely nonexistent. Last fall, Ukraine deployed 8,500 troops to its northern border, a mix of border police, national guard forces and military that was mostly directed at preventing Belarus from sending Middle Eastern migrants over the border the way it had in Poland and Lithuania.</p> <p>Though that force remains in the border region, its members have left the vicinity of Novi Yarylovychi. There is now just a handful of border guards, armed with automatic rifles, stationed at the post, little deterrence should a Russian tank unit make a sudden thrust toward the capital. A truck driver ferrying candle wax who had just crossed into Ukraine and would give only his first name, Yevgeni, said he had seen columns of military vehicles including armored personnel carriers with license plates indicating they had come from the Ryazan region southeast of Moscow.</p> <p>“There are kilometer-long columns there, escorted by police,” he said.</p> <p>Indeed, new troops, armor and equipment have been pouring into Belarus daily. News reports from within Belarus have shown local officials flanked by Belarusian women in traditional dress, greeting Russian military commanders with loaves of bread and salt, a traditional welcome.</p> <p>Russia is deploying some of its most advanced and well-equipped forces to nine different bases and airfields around Belarus, the Russian Defense Ministry says. Already, highly trained special forces units and airborne troops, together with powerful S-400 antiaircraft systems and hundreds of aircraft have begun to arrive at bases around the country, Ukrainian and western officials say.</p>

The goal of the exercises, named “Allied Resolve,” is to “develop different options for jointly neutralizing threats and stabilizing the situation on the borders,” Russia’s deputy defense minister, Aleksandr V. Fomin, said in a meeting with foreign military attachés in Moscow this month.

Dressed in green camouflage, Aleksei Shevchuk, the all-business first deputy commander of the border post, said that he and his comrades would be ready to put up a fight should Russian forces appear on the border. But he acknowledged that there would be little they could do against Russian tanks.

“Visually we don’t see anything, not equipment, not people and not Belarusian armed forces near the post,” he said. “In the case of invasion or other nonstandard situation on the state border, we shall act, but for the moment everything is going according to plan.”

Historically, Belarus has given Ukraine little trouble. Though its authoritarian leader, [Aleksandr G. Lukashenko](#), is perhaps closer to Moscow than any other post-Soviet head of state, he had in the past largely avoided picking sides in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. That changed after presidential elections in August 2020, when the Russian intelligence services were forced to come to his rescue amid an outbreak of sprawling protests against his rule.

Since then, he has recognized Russia’s annexation of Crimea and vowed to support Moscow in any military action involving Ukraine. Like his Russian counterpart, Vladimir V. Putin, he has, without providing evidence, accused Ukraine of escalating tensions and threatening war.

“Ten years ago, we could not have imagined that a moment like today would arrive when we would have to establish military units and a whole union in defense of our southern border,” Mr. Lukashenko [said on a visit to Belarusian military bases this month](#). And in an [address to the nation](#) on Friday, Mr. Lukashenko accused the West of seeking to “drown the Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood in blood.”

Mr. Reznikov, the Ukrainian defense minister, assessed that Russia could use the territory of Belarus to threaten not only Ukraine but “all of Europe,” though he expressed hope that diplomacy and de-escalation would prevail.

Some European leaders are less optimistic. While military analysts say there is little chance at the moment that Mr. Lukashenko, let alone Mr. Putin, would risk open warfare with a NATO country, leaders in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and the Baltic countries, are growing increasingly nervous.

“We are reaching the point where continuous Russian and Belarusian military buildup in Europe needs to be addressed by appropriate NATO countermeasures,” Edgars Rinkēvičs, Latvia’s foreign minister, [tweeted](#) this week. On Tuesday the Pentagon [put 8,500 troops on “heightened alert,”](#) as President Biden [weighed sending more assets](#) to reinforce NATO units in Eastern Europe.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s secretary general, accused Russia this week of pursuing a military buildup in Belarus “under the guise of an exercise.”

“These are highly capable, combat-ready troops, and there is no transparency on these deployments,” he said. “It adds to the tensions and it shows that there is no de-escalation. On the contrary, it’s actually more troops, more capabilities in more countries.”

Some in Ukraine have criticized the government for not doing enough to shore up the country’s defenses, on the Belarus border or elsewhere.

“The biggest danger is that Ukrainian forces are mainly concentrated in the east of Ukraine, but the closest route to Kyiv is from Belarus,” said Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who was prime minister of Ukraine when war broke out in 2014. “It’s just as urgent to send additional military units to protect Kyiv as the capital, to make military roadblocks. That’s what we did in 2014.”



	<p>The Ukrainians who work in a strip of shops and offices in the shadow of the Novi Yarylovychi border post said they were not completely convinced that war was inevitable, at least one so far from the conflict zone in the east. But they had detected a change in the air.</p> <p>“People have started to drive through less frequently because the television is inflaming the situation,” said Viktor Beznoshenko, who runs a small travel insurance office.</p> <p>Though he said he doubted Russia would launch a wider war against Ukraine, he compared Moscow to a 6-foot-5 neighbor who wakes up one morning and decides to push his fence deeper onto your property.</p> <p>“Belarus decided, ‘Well, OK, let him move the fence,’” he said. “But Ukraine doesn’t want to agree to this. We’re not going to let him move his fence.”</p> <p>As Yuri Lukasevich, a truck driver, prepared to take his semi-truck through the border crossing into Belarus, he said he hoped that should Russia attack, the United States and NATO would step in to help Ukraine.</p> <p>And if that doesn’t happen?</p> <p>“We’ll fight,” he said. “We’re Ukrainians. We’re prepared for anything.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 US warnings strain Ukraine partnership</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/europe/biden-ukraine-russia-diplomacy.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/europe/biden-ukraine-russia-diplomacy.html</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian officials sharply criticized the Biden administration Friday for its ominous warnings of an imminent Russian attack, saying they had needlessly spread alarm, even as a new Pentagon assessment said Russia was now positioned to go beyond a limited incursion and invade all of Ukraine.</p> <p>The diverging viewpoints brought into the open the stark disagreement between Ukraine and its key partner over how to assess the threat posed by Russia, which has massed about 130,000 troops on Ukraine’s border in what American officials are calling a grave threat to global peace and stability.</p> <p>The tensions, which have simmered in the background for weeks, have surfaced at a particularly delicate moment, as President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia reviews the American response to his demands for addressing Russian security concerns in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>“They keep supporting this theme, this topic,” President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said of the repeated warnings by American officials. “And they make it as acute and burning as possible. In my opinion, this is a mistake.”</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky voiced his displeasure just hours before top U.S. military officials issued another dire appraisal of Ukraine’s predicament, saying that Russia has deployed sufficient troops and military hardware to invade all of Ukraine, far beyond a limited incursion into only the border regions.</p> <p>“I think you’d have to go back quite a while to the Cold War days to see something of this magnitude,” Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a news conference at the Pentagon.</p> <p>Prospects for a negotiated end to the crises remained uncertain at best on Friday. Following a video conference between Mr. Putin and President Emmanuel Macron of France, the Kremlin said in a statement that “the principal concerns of Russia went unaddressed” in the American response, even as Mr. Macron advocated a conciliatory approach to achieve a diplomatic solution.</p> <p>Moscow has threatened a “military-technical response” should its concerns not be met.</p>



Behind the scenes, the Americans are planning to impose severe sanctions on some of the largest state banks and financial institutions in Russia — penalties that the United States says would far exceed previous Western sanctions.

As they have done throughout the crisis, Russian officials sent mixed messages about the state of negotiations with the West. Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said in a radio interview that Washington's written response this week contained "a kernel of rationality" on some matters.

Those include missile deployments and military exercises in Eastern Europe, though Mr. Lavrov also said that neither the United States or NATO was seriously addressing the most pressing Kremlin concerns. Russia has demanded that the West scale back its military presence in Eastern Europe to early post-Cold War levels and guarantee that Ukraine never join NATO.

A glimmer of hope came in the form of European-led negotiations this week along a separate diplomatic track, known as the Normandy Format, a grouping that includes France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia. Their meetings center on the cease-fire agreement that the countries brokered in eastern Ukraine in 2015 but also offer a path to a broader settlement.

After Mr. Putin and Mr. Macron spoke on Friday, a senior official in the French presidency said the two leaders had agreed that their countries should pursue talks through that group. The countries will continue discussions in two weeks in Berlin.

Mr. Macron and Mr. Putin agreed on the need for continued dialogue and "de-escalation," and Mr. Putin said he had "no offensive plans" in eastern Ukraine, according to the French presidency.

As the West awaited Mr. Putin's next step, Ukrainian officials expressed increasing annoyance with the Biden administration as they stepped up their calls for calm.

Speaking just a day after a phone call with President Biden, Mr. Zelensky said that while he too saw grave risk in the Russian buildup, the American policy of publicizing intelligence and risk assessments around the Russian threat was unnerving Ukrainians and harming the economy at a time when he said he would like to see "quiet military preparation and quiet diplomacy."

"There is military support, financial support, we are grateful for the support," Mr. Zelensky said at a news conference for foreign media, according to a Ukrainian government translation. "But I cannot be like other politicians who are grateful to the United States just for being the United States."

His complaints were echoed by his top security official, Oleksii Danilov, who said in an interview that "panic is the sister of failure."

"That's why we are saying to our partners, 'Don't shout so much,'" he said. "Do you see a threat? Give us 10 jets every day. Not one, 10. And the threat will disappear."

It is not clear what the long-term ramifications of the rift might be. It is unlikely that Mr. Zelensky's statements would have any effect on arms shipments or diplomacy as the West tries to deter Mr. Putin from military action. But further divergence between the two countries could induce Ukraine to pursue a separate path to a settlement, one that it has been exploring in the European-led talks underway now. It could also sow distrust that Mr. Putin could try to exploit.

Last fall, it was the United States that first raised the alarm about the growing Russian troop presence on the border with Ukraine, and since then Mr. Zelensky's government has often appeared reluctant to fully embrace the Biden administration's sense of urgency.

On Thursday, the Pentagon, which has ordered 8,500 American troops to be on "high alert" for deployment to Eastern Europe, said that Russia had continued to build up "credible combat forces" over the last 24 hours.

The United States' new, more ominous assessment of Russia's readiness for a full-scale invasion followed on Friday.

Officials and analysts see a variety of reasons for the disconnect between Ukrainian and American approaches to publicizing the threat. For eight years, Ukraine has been engaged in a war that ebbs and flows with Russian-backed separatists in two breakaway provinces in eastern Ukraine. Periods of intense fighting and escalation have followed long stretches of calm. Ukrainians, officials say, view the Russian threat as part of their daily existence.

Mr. Zelensky is also primarily concerned about the effects on the economy and domestic stability, but there are other dangers, said Maria Zolkina, a political analyst with the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, a Kyiv-based research group.

"The more serious the expectation when it comes to aggression, the more Ukraine could be pressured into making a range of concessions to Russia in order to lower the tensions," she said.

Another divergence between Ukraine and its western allies, Ms. Zolkina said, could be the weight they give to certain types of intelligence. The American and British intelligence services might have superior access to information about troop movements and even classified decision making within the Kremlin, she said, but the Ukrainians look at that intelligence with a deeper understanding of the context.

In his remarks, Mr. Zelensky echoed this sentiment.

"If you look only at the satellites you will see the increase in troops and you can't assess whether this is just a threat of attack or just a simple rotation," he said. "Our professional people look deep into it."

Ukrainian officials have also been sharply critical of the decision by the United States, Britain and others to withdraw nonessential staff from embassies in Kyiv, calling it premature. Mr. Zelensky noted that Greece had not even removed diplomats from a consulate near the front lines in the east, "where you can hear the cannons firing."

Diplomats, he added, "are the last who should be leaving the ship and I don't think we have a Titanic here."

The rift was exacerbated just over a week ago when Mr. Biden suggested that a "minor incursion" by Russian forces into Ukraine, rather than a full-fledged invasion, might not elicit the same forceful response the White House has been promising.

Mr. Zelensky responded publicly on Twitter: "We want to remind the great powers that there are no minor incursions and small nations," he wrote. His posting angered the White House and Ukraine's allies on Capitol Hill. "We are quite exasperated," one congressional Democrat said, speaking on condition of anonymity, suggesting the Ukrainian president had not been getting the best advice on how to navigate Washington.

The Kremlin has taken notice of the discord, too.

"Now, the Americans have started to so blatantly and cynically use Ukraine against Russia that even the regime in Kyiv has become alarmed," Mr. Lavrov said earlier Friday, commenting on the breach even before Mr. Zelensky spoke. "They are saying, 'there's no need to ramp up the discussion, to use military rhetoric, why are you evacuating diplomats?'"

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HEADLINE	01/28 Local Ukrainians: concern Russia tensions
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/politics/western-washington-ukrainians-russia-tensions/281-952c11cc-f275-412a-bf40-beda37803ff">https://www.king5.com/article/news/politics/western-washington-ukrainians-russia-tensions/281-952c11cc-f275-412a-bf40-beda37803ff</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Members of the Ukrainian community in western Washington spoke out Friday on the tensions between Ukraine and Russia as President Joe Biden and NATO allies have warned an invasion could come any moment.</p> <p>It is a proud yet little known fact in western Washington. Ukrainian Americans live here by the hundreds of thousands. Washington has the fifth-highest concentration of Ukrainian immigrants of any state in the nation.</p> <p>They flooded here after the Soviet Union collapsed 30 years ago and now wonder what will happen if the Russians try to reclaim Ukraine and the land of the friends and family still in the country.</p> <p>"I worry about what is going on in Ukraine," said a straightforward Valeriy Goloborodko. "They are testing us."</p> <p>Goloborodko, who lives in Bellevue, serves as the honorary consul for the Ukrainian Consulate in Seattle.</p> <p>"The threat – it is there. We know that. We Ukrainians know that very well," he said in between meetings on Friday.</p> <p>"We're looking at a humanitarian disaster of catastrophic proportion in Europe since World War II. I'm concerned for my family," admitted Katerina Sedova of Seattle.</p> <p>She migrated here in the early 90s, has worked in the tech sector and is now a research fellow for the Center for Security and Emerging Technology at Georgetown University. Sedova said she has been in constant contact with family in Ukraine and said some are concerned, and others have learned to live with the threat. After all, there have been tensions since 2014 when Russian troops invaded the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.</p> <p>But even this is different, she said.</p> <p>"We're looking at over 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border," Sedova said. "We're looking at troops pulled from all the way in the far east, 12 time zones. If this is an exercise, it's a pretty serious exercise and the largest we have ever seen. Yeah, it's a serious threat.</p> <p>"Ukraine stands on the boundary of defending exactly the same rights and freedoms that people of the United States have fought for and died for centuries. It's a young democracy; it wants to stay a young democracy."</p> <p>Across town, Lidia Mykytyn shared a similar view, as an advisor for the Ukrainian Association of Washington State.</p> <p>"Ukraine did absolutely nothing to provoke the Russian troops at the border," she said.</p> <p>Mykytyn recently revisited her roots in 2018 as part of a humanitarian mission in a conflict zone on the eastern edge of the country. She believes that Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to recreate a sphere of influence.</p> <p>"I hope that diplomatic means come to the table, (because) any type of military invasion, any type of war is going to have its ramifications that are going to hit us globally," Mykytyn said</p> <p>Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday that he is urging people to turn down the rhetoric and dial down the panic.</p> <p>Yet, half a world away, in this cluster of Ukrainian immigrants, they aren't ready to calm down just yet.</p>

	"It is about principal and balance," said Goloborodko. "Those values need to be protected."
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Recall: rapid antigen, rapid antibody tests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/fda-empowered-diagnostics-covid-test-recall/507-4535fc57-89e7-4333-a2d6-aead8efbe922">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/fda-empowered-diagnostics-covid-test-recall/507-4535fc57-89e7-4333-a2d6-aead8efbe922</a>
GIST	<p>The Food and Drug Administration <a href="#">warned people</a> Friday to stop using a specific brand of rapid COVID antigen and antibody tests, saying there could be a higher risk of false results. It comes <a href="#">two weeks after a similar warning</a> about other tests.</p> <p>Empowered Diagnostics is recalling its CovClear COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test and ImmunoPass COVID-19 Neutralizing Antibody Rapid Test.</p> <p>According to the FDA, the Empowered Diagnostics tests weren't authorized by the FDA, despite labeling that indicated otherwise. The agency said it is concerned about a "potentially higher risk of false results" from unauthorized tests.</p> <p>The CovClear COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test uses a nasal swab sample to detect antigens from the virus, the FDA said. The ImmunoPass COVID-19 Neutralizing Antibody Rapid Test uses a blood sample to detect antibodies from a person's immune response to the virus. Antibody tests like this one show whether a person was previously infected, so they shouldn't be used to diagnose an active COVID-19 case.</p> <p>Anyone who received the CovClear COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test in the last two weeks is urged by the FDA to get tested again.</p> <p>The tests were distributed from January to November 2021. According to the <a href="#">recall notice</a>, at least 284,575 antigen tests and 2,100 antibody tests are included. The company first started the recall late last month and has alerted customers and distributors via email. According to the company's website, the CovClear test is authorized in Canada for over-the-counter use at home and other non-laboratory sites.</p> <p>If you think you had a problem with a COVID-19 test, you can report it <a href="#">through the FDA's website</a>.</p> <p>A false negative on an antigen test may tell a person they do not have COVID-19 when they actually do have it, the FDA said. A false positive would mean the person is told they have COVID-19 but really don't.</p> <p>Conversely, a false negative on an antibody test would mean the person is told they don't have antibodies to the coronavirus but actually do have them. A false positive means the opposite -- the test says they do have the antibodies but really don't.</p> <p>The FDA issued a similar alert on Jan. 11 for antigen and antibody tests from LuSys Laboratories.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Concern: Covid could affect eyesight</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/new-concern-covid-19-could-affect-your-eyesight/UBU75SV3XNFFTM5XAKXBQUKOE/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/new-concern-covid-19-could-affect-your-eyesight/UBU75SV3XNFFTM5XAKXBQUKOE/</a>
GIST	<p>As the omicron variant begins to fade, now comes word that COVID-19 could affect your vision.</p> <p>That is especially important because an estimated 75,000 people in Washington have sight-stealing glaucoma. And, according to one doctor, half of them do not know it.</p> <p>Glaucoma is called the "sneak thief of sight" for a reason. If left untreated, it can cause you to go blind, hardly knowing what hit you.</p>

COVID-19 has long been known to make a body very sick. It turns out, it could make your eyes sick, too.

“If I hadn’t come to Dr. Whitehead, I would be blind now.”

That is the grim news Cathleen Kallmeyer got when she came to Evergreen Eye Care in the Swedish Hospital complex two years ago. She was told she would likely go blind in six short months.

“It stops you in your tracks,” Kallmeyer said.

“Glaucoma is a group of diseases where the pressure inside the eye is too high,” Whitehead said. “And that high pressure damages the nerve in the back of the eye.”

He says thousands of Washingtonians of all races and genders already have glaucoma and not all of them know it.

Now there is growing concern that COVID-19 could damage the eyes of those who get sick.

“The body’s immune response is so robust to this new pathogen, there are protein markers inside of your body that the body can become confused and think that that might be COVID-19,” Whitehead said.

He said if the body gets confused, “it might attack parts of the eye.

“Usually, it’ll cause a decrease in vision,” he said. “It could then cause a secondary cause of glaucoma, can also cause things like cataracts, retinal swelling. All kinds of problems inside the eye.”

Kallmeyer said that after several surgeries, Whitehead helped save her vision.

“It really was a miracle for me,” she said.

Now that she knows about the potential effects of COVID-19 on eyesight, she wants to help spread the word.

“Oh I want them all to know,” Kallmeyer said. “I don’t want anybody to have go through that kind of fright.”

Whitehead recommends that everyone gets their eyes checked, especially those over 60.

After all, glaucoma produces no symptoms. The earlier it is caught, the less vision is lost.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Gov. advises caution; still need be vigilant</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/inslee-says-there-are-signs-of-hope-in-covid-19-fight-advises-caution">https://komonews.com/news/local/inslee-says-there-are-signs-of-hope-in-covid-19-fight-advises-caution</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Governor Inslee says there is a sign of hope in the fight against COVID-19, but he cautions that we still need to be vigilant.</p> <p>“We hope that we will experience what other countries have experienced, that we will see a rapid decline, almost as rapid as the increase that we have experienced,” Inslee said. “But we cannot let our guard down now.”</p> <p>The governor says as people continue to get vaccinated it appears the omicron variant case numbers will start to look better. Something Dr Anthony Chen of the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department says he agrees with.</p>

"The good news is that we're topping out and coming down the other side. However, we've known from other surges that things might go up fast, but they don't come down fast," Dr. Chen said. "They can drag out for a while."

But he and the governor say we have to hang in there. KOMO asked the governor, "How are you keeping yourself energized personally and what can you do to actually help other people stay energized in the face of all of this COVID fatigue?"

He replied.

"I feel as energetic as the day COVID started," Inslee said. "And I also feel hopeful. I think in the relative near term we may be in a place to have a much more normal endemic approach to what will be with us for a long period of time. And I'm looking forward to that day."

At the mass vaccination site in Lakewood, Layne Tritle said the governors messaging has been important in getting people to vaccinate.

"Definitely yes," Tritle said. "Because I think it's smart to get vaccinated and I think with those big images putting it out there it helps get the ball rolling a little bit."

"I just wanted to get my final booster so I help put an end to COVID-19 and help get back to normal life."

Inslee commented.

"Look we are looking forward to the days when this becomes an 'end-demic' situation rather than a pandemic situation," Inslee said. "A day when we can return to a much more normal status. And yes, we're happy that our restaurants are open. We are extremely happy that our schools are open. We're happy about our economic growth. But we're really looking forward to the days when we can remove some of our requirements."

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HEADLINE	01/28 Buyers vie fewer homes as listings decline
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/buyers-vie-for-fewer-homes-as-listings-decline/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/buyers-vie-for-fewer-homes-as-listings-decline/</a>
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hoping to buy a home that fits your needs and budget in the next few weeks? You might want to settle in for a long search.</p> <p>The inventory of homes for sale nationally dropped to its lowest level in more than two decades last month. And a snapshot of this month so far isn't encouraging, with the number of homes on the market running well below year-ago levels.</p> <p>While fewer homeowners typically list their homes in the winter months, the ultra-low level of properties on the market now makes landing a home more challenging at a time when the housing market continues to favor sellers over buyers.</p> <p>"Extraordinarily few homes (are) on the market, and that means home shoppers will really notice fewer options when they go house hunting," said Jeff Tucker senior economist at Zillow. "And it means there's more competition over the homes that do get listed."</p> <p>Coming off the best year for home sales since 2006, the height of the last housing bubble, the number of U.S. homes for sale stood last month at just 910,000, the fewest on records going back to 1999, according to the National Association of Realtors.</p> <p>The holiday season, colder weather and surging coronavirus cases may have given some sellers reason to put off listing their homes last month. Another factor is simply that homes have been getting snapped up</p>

so quickly, often within days of hitting the market, that there are fewer listings that carry over from one month to the next.

Consider that in December 2019, before the pandemic, there were 40.5% more homes on the market than last month, according to Zillow.

Sellers haven't been in a hurry to list their homes in the new year. New listings are down 10.1% so far this month compared to this time last year, while "active" listings overall are down 28.6%, according to Realtor.com.

"Real estate markets remain active so far this winter," said Danielle Hale, chief economist for Realtor.com. "Data shows buyers continued searching the still-limited for sale home supply last week, which declined again along with new listings."

Traditionally, homes are slow to hit the market during the winter months. The inventory typically picks up as the spring homebuying season starts in late February and then peaks in the summer.

That pattern generally held true over the past two years as the pandemic upended the economy and then helped fuel a homebuying frenzy as many Americans seized on record low mortgage rates to expand their living space. All told, sales of previously occupied homes reached 6.1 million last year and were up 8.5% from 2020, according to the NAR.

The sizzling housing market intensified a long-running demand-supply imbalance, however. And as buyers snapped up homes sometimes days after they hit the market, those still on the hunt were competing for fewer and fewer available properties.

While housing demand is expected to once again far outstrip supply this year, economists expect home inventory will rise off rock-bottom lows by the end of 2022.

Sellers who were holding off due to the omicron surge may list their homes this spring. Homebuilders are also expected to give the market a boost as they follow up a strong 2021.

Despite dealing with supply chain constraints and rising material and labor costs, U.S. homebuilders broke ground on nearly 1.6 million housing units last year, a 15.6% increase over 2020.

Construction of new homes has risen the past three months and seems poised to climb further. Applications for building permits, which can forecast future building activity, rose 9.1% to a seasonally-adjusted annual rate of 1.87 million units in December. That's the strongest month for permits since last January.

Meanwhile, mortgage rates, which have been rising on expectations that the Federal Reserve will begin dialing back its monthly bond purchases to tame inflation, could make for a less heated market. Higher rates reduce buyers' purchasing power, which could force some to stay on the sidelines, giving an edge to those with more financial flexibility.

"A lot of homebuyers are maybe going to be knocked out of the running by higher rates," Tucker said.

This is likely to be more pronounced in pricier markets, such as San Francisco, Seattle and Boston, and less likely to limit buyers in the more affordable markets in the Sunbelt and Southeast, he said.

Higher rates could also dissuade some homeowners from selling, especially if they've bought or refinanced their home when mortgage rates fell to new lows early last year.

"They may decide to just stay put and that could hold back some of the inventory I otherwise would expect to hit the market this spring," Tucker said.



HEADLINE	01/28 King Co. \$2.5M deadly shooting settlement
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/king-county-pays-2-5m-to-family-of-black-diamond-man-killed-by-deputies-after-stealing-truck-dog/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/king-county-pays-2-5m-to-family-of-black-diamond-man-killed-by-deputies-after-stealing-truck-dog/</a>
GIST	<p>King County has agreed to pay \$2.5 million to settle a claim by the family of Anthony Chilcott, who was <a href="#">shot and killed by deputies</a> after stealing a hot-rod pickup truck and a pet poodle, according to the family's attorney.</p> <p>The November 2019 incident was sharply criticized by investigators and resulted in the termination of one of the officers involved.</p> <p>In a rare move, the claim filed against the county by Chilcott's mother and sister, Monica Crotty and Amanda Castro, both now living in Texas, was resolved before a lawsuit was filed and involved a face-to-face meeting with interim Sheriff Patti Cole-Tindall, a representative of the civil division of the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the county's risk manager, according to attorney Tony Russo.</p> <p>Russo said all three parties made a "sincere apology" to the family and that the sheriff's office has promised to implement reforms recommended in a critical review of Chilcott's shooting. The reforms involve limits on the use of plainclothes officers and focus on de-escalation methods and techniques that an internal investigation found were lacking or ignored during the incident that killed Chilcott.</p> <p>"Your decision to participate in utmost good faith in an early resolution of the family's claim that culminated in today's settlement should help all of us turn the page on this unnecessary and tragic loss of life," Russo wrote in a Thursday email to the county following mediation. "That act of humanity, even more so than the \$2.5 million dollar settlement, demonstrated an acceptance of responsibility by leadership of King County and will help the family on the long road to healing."</p> <p>The Chilcott settlement is the latest in a string of police use-of-force, wrongful death and abuse claims and lawsuits settled by agencies or handed down by juries in Washington since January 2021, totaling more than \$38.6 million in payouts, according to data compiled by The Seattle Times.</p> <p>Crotty said Friday in a phone interview she was grateful for the county, and particularly Cole-Tindall, for their willingness to address policy shortcomings that contributed to her son's death, particularly issues surrounding the use of plainclothes deputies and unmarked vehicles.</p> <p>"I just want to be able to honor my son," she said. "I'm glad things have been put in place to prevent this from happening to someone else. It makes me feel like Tony didn't die in vain."</p> <p>In a written statement, Cole-Tindall said she hopes the agreement will help Chilcott's family move "closer to healing."</p> <p>"This year brought new leadership to the King County Sheriff's Office, and Executive (Dow) Constantine and I are committed to do right by our community," she wrote. "Every member of our team shares my pledge to partner with communities and other critical stakeholders in our review of these incidents, and prevent them from happening in the future."</p> <p>Chilcott, <a href="#">36, was well-known to law enforcement and residents of Black Diamond</a>, and was involved in a string of petty offenses when he stole a souped-up Ford Raptor pickup truck from a gas station in Black Diamond on Nov. 22, 2019. Inside the truck was a poodle named Monkey — which elevated interest in the theft.</p> <p>According to interviews and documents obtained by The Seattle Times, Chilcott drove from Black Diamond to Sparks, Nevada, where a former girlfriend lived. He apparently drove by her house (the woman said she never saw him), turned around and drove back to Washington, Monkey in tow.</p>

The morning of Nov. 25, Chilcott was spotted by police roaring around Black Diamond back roads in the truck. After a brief chase with state patrol troopers — called off by a supervisor — two plainclothes deputies, George Alvarez and Josh Lerum, driving an unmarked SUV without emergency lights or equipment, rammed Chilcott at an intersection on the Cumberland-Kanasket Road, pushing it onto a string of boulders, where it high-centered and disabled.

Chilcott either refused to exit or couldn't open the damaged door, and evidence showed he gunned the engine and shifted gears several times; however, the truck was stuck. The sheriff's office, in its investigation, questioned whether Chilcott recognized the men as police.

The officers broke out the windows of the truck with a hammer and their handguns, and each of them shot the unarmed Chilcott in the head, claiming he was trying to drive away and they feared for their lives.

An internal investigation, overseen by Cole-Tindall, undersheriff at the time, found the deputies violated policy, engaged in questionable tactics and needlessly escalated the situation. While then-Sheriff Mitzi Johanknecht found the shooting justified, [she fired Alvarez, who was involved in four previous shootings](#). He has appealed that decision.

The early resolution of the claim, before a lawsuit was filed, marks a sharp departure from other recent claims and lawsuits filed against the sheriff's office involving allegations of wrongful death and excessive force. The family of 17-year-old Mi'Chance Dunlap-Gittens, [killed by deputies during a misguided sting operation](#) involving plainclothes officers, [filed a federal lawsuit](#) in 2019 and fought in court for a year before the county settled for \$2.25 million.

The family of 20-year-old Burien High School graduate Tommy Le, shot in the back by Deputy Cesar Molina in 2017 after reportedly threatening deputies with a ballpoint pen, fought a three-year, tooth-and-nail battle with the county in federal court, including a trip to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, before the county [settled the case last year for \\$5 million](#), days before it was set to go to trial.

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HEADLINE	01/28 Finalist SPL chief librarian faces criticism
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/seattle-chief-librarian-finalist-under-fire-for-working-remotely-in-current-job/">https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/seattle-chief-librarian-finalist-under-fire-for-working-remotely-in-current-job/</a>
GIST	<p>A finalist for Seattle Public Library's chief librarian position is under fire for his decision to run a library system in Minnesota from his home in Los Angeles.</p> <p>Chad Helton, the library director for Hennepin County in Minnesota, drew criticism from union leaders, library staffers and the public when he permanently moved to L.A. last summer, according to <a href="#">the Minneapolis Star Tribune</a>.</p> <p>At the time, Hennepin County Library permitted employees to work from home remotely during the pandemic, and Helton, hired in 2020, insisted he could operate the library through video meetings, according to the Star Tribune.</p> <p>Hennepin County officials later announced a policy, which takes effect Monday, requiring all county supervisors to live in Minnesota or Wisconsin, unless they are granted an exemption.</p> <p>Now, Helton is one of two finalists under consideration to replace Seattle's former chief librarian, Marcellus Turner, who <a href="#">left the role last March</a>.</p> <p>SPL spokesperson Laura Gentry on Friday said members of the search committee were aware of Helton's residency issue with Hennepin County, but felt his qualifications and first-round interview responses were "strong and worthy of further consideration."</p>

	<p>“The position profile drafted for the Chief Librarian search is intentionally community-focused, making it important that the successful candidate be able to conduct community-centered work, including staying connected to our physical facilities and interacting in-person with Library patrons, partners, staff and other stakeholders,” SPL Board President Carmen Bendixen said in a statement.</p> <p>Gentry declined to comment on whether Helton gave any assurances he would move in his first-round interview, citing confidentiality for job interviews.</p> <p>Hennepin County did not respond to requests for comment Friday.</p> <p>SPL announced Helton and Seattle’s interim chief librarian, Tom Fay, as finalists on Tuesday. Fay has been with SPL since 2015 and was formerly the library’s director of programs and services.</p> <p>Turner made about <a href="#">\$198,000 in 2019</a> to run Seattle’s 27 library branches, according to city of Seattle payroll data.</p> <p>Final interviews will be held the second week of February. Both candidates will speak with the library’s board of trustees and senior management and join virtual discussions with library staff and the public.</p> <p>Fay’s session will take place Feb. 9, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and Helton’s session will be the same hours on Feb. 10. Visit <a href="#">spl.org</a> for more information. Links to the sessions will be posted closer to the dates.</p> <p>The board expects to announce its decision in late February or early March, according to Gentry.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Tacoma large homeless camp to be cleared</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article257814388.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article257814388.html</a>
GIST	<p>A large homeless encampment beneath Interstate 705 in downtown Tacoma will be cleared next week, the city of Tacoma confirmed on Friday.</p> <p>“Due to imminent threats to public safety, the City Manager has authorized staff to post the 705 encampment for removal and clean up,” city spokesperson Megan Snow said in an email statement to The News Tribune.</p> <p>Notices were to be posted Friday with clean-up beginning Feb. 4.</p> <p>“There are approximately 60-80 individuals at this location and outreach workers will begin focused work to provide resources for shelter beginning Tuesday, February 1. Outreach will continue through next week,” Snow said.</p> <p>When asked about the imminent threats, Snow said there were several fires at the encampment this week that led to concerns from the fire department for the safety of the people beneath the overpass.</p> <p>When asked whether this sweep had anything to do with the business summit held at the LeMay - America’s Car Museum on Wednesday, in which business owners asked for action by the city against crime, including addressing homeless encampments, Snow said it did not.</p> <p>“It was really tied to public safety concerns,” Snow said.</p> <p>WSDOT crews will be out later next week to inspect the infrastructure. In the past two months, crews have been out to that location three times to inspect the infrastructure.</p>

Bill Lemke, executive director and co-founder of NW Furniture Bank, said he's seen impacts from the encampment worsen over the past couple of years, primarily in 2021. NW Furniture Bank is located along Puyallup Avenue right next to the site.

"Our building has been shot. Our sign has been shot. We've had arrows shot into our parking lot," Lemke said.

Lemke has witnessed the fires that occurred at the site and said in 2021 nine windows were busted out of the building. Abandoned cars make it difficult for volunteers and workers to get in and out of the area.

"It impacts our staff. They get demoralized," Lemke said.

Lemke wrote city manager Elizabeth Pauli in September asking for help, and again in January, detailing the issues he's seen. He said the system needs to find a way to get people living in the camp housing or other resources.

"The people under 705 are human beings and should not have to live as they do. It is inhumane what is going on there," he said.

Speaking by phone Friday, Lemke told The News Tribune that he knows clearing the camp will help with the problems there. The NW Furniture Bank provides recycled, donated furniture to people in need, and Lemke said he sees the people living at the site as future clients.

"The system should get them into housing and or treatment," he said.

Maureen Howard, a volunteer with the Tacoma-Pierce County Homeless Coalition, repeated the same question she's had for years: "Where will they go?" Howard said the city should not be conducting sweeps if people living in camps only get displaced.

"You cannot both say that you are incredibly concerned for the well-being of people experiencing homelessness and simultaneously not provide them with a place to live," Howard said by phone Friday.

Howard said she knows it's a complex issue, but that there's still no clear plan for moving people who are unsheltered into shelter.

"The heavy-handed sweep response from the city to me is a desperation move," Howard said. "They either don't know how to invest in helping people from their tent or their vehicle into safe shelter or they don't want to invest."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 DOH: 1,294,298 cases, 10,699 deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257829713.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257829713.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 14,304 new COVID-19 cases on Friday. Statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 1,294,298.</p> <p>As of Friday, the preliminary death tally is 10,699. The confirmed death tally is 10,336 as of Jan. 11.</p> <p>As of Jan. 15, the date with the most recent complete data, 251 people with confirmed cases of COVID-19 were admitted to Washington state hospitals.</p> <p>For the past seven days, Washington has had an increasing case rate of 1,907.3 per 100,000 people. The national rate for the same period was 1,218.2 per 100,000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>
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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/31 Attacks hobble pandemic-weary schools
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-health-business-hacking-aecb37a35f3677e4f2cc62362a23defa">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-health-business-hacking-aecb37a35f3677e4f2cc62362a23defa</a>
GIST	<p>ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — For teachers at a middle school in New Mexico’s largest city, the first inkling of a widespread tech problem came during an early morning staff call.</p> <p>On the video, there were shout-outs for a new custodian for his hard work, and the typical announcements from administrators and the union rep. But in the chat, there were hints of a looming crisis. Nobody could open attendance records, and everyone was locked out of class rosters and grades.</p> <p>Albuquerque administrators later confirmed the outage that blocked access to the district’s student database — which also includes emergency contacts and lists of which adults are authorized to pick up which children — was due to a ransomware attack.</p> <p>“I didn’t realize how important it was until I couldn’t use it,” said Sarah Hager, a Cleveland Middle School art teacher.</p> <p>Cyberattacks like the one that canceled classes for two days in Albuquerque’s biggest school district have become a growing threat to U.S. schools, with several high-profile incidents reported since last year. And the coronavirus pandemic has compounded their effects: More money has been demanded, and more schools have had to shut down as they scramble to recover data or even manually wipe all laptops.</p> <p>“Pretty much any way that you cut it, incidents have both been growing more frequent and more significant,” said Doug Levin, director of the K12 Security Information Exchange, a Virginia-based nonprofit that helps schools defend against cybersecurity risk.</p> <p>Precise data is hard to come by since most schools are not required to publicly report cyberattacks. But experts say public school systems — which often have limited budgets for cybersecurity expertise — have become an inviting target for ransomware gangs.</p> <p>The pandemic also has forced schools to turn increasingly toward virtual learning, making them more dependent on technology and more vulnerable to cyber-extortion. School systems that have had instruction disrupted include those in Baltimore County and Miami-Dade County, along with districts in New Jersey, Wisconsin and elsewhere.</p> <p>Levin’s group has tracked well over 1,200 cyber security incidents since 2016 at public school districts across the country. They included 209 ransomware attacks, when hackers lock data up and charge to unlock it; 53 “denial of service” attacks, where attackers sabotage or slow a network by faking server requests; 156 “Zoombombing” incidents, where an unauthorized person intrudes on a video call; and more than 110 phishing attacks, where a deceptive message tricks a user to let a hacker into their network.</p> <p>Recent attacks also come as schools grapple with multiple other challenges related to the pandemic. Teachers get sick, and there aren’t substitutes to cover them. Where there are strict virus testing protocols, there aren’t always tests or people to give them.</p> <p>In New York City, an attack this month on third-party software vendor Illuminate Education didn’t result in canceled classes, but teachers across the city couldn’t access grades. Local media reported the outage added to stress for educators already juggling instruction with enforcing COVID-19 protocols and covering for colleagues who were sick or in quarantine.</p>

Albuquerque Superintendent Scott Elder said getting all students and staff online during the pandemic created additional avenues for hackers to access the district's system. He cited that as a factor in the Jan. 12 ransomware attack that canceled classes for some 75,000 students.

The cancellations — which Elder called “cyber snow days” — gave technicians a five-day window to reset the databases over a holiday weekend.

Elder said there's no evidence student information was obtained by hackers. He declined to say whether the district paid a ransom but noted there would be a “public process” if it did.

Hager, the art teacher, said the cyberattack increased stress on campus in ways that parents didn't see.

Fire drills were canceled because fire alarms didn't work. Intercoms stopped working.

Nurses couldn't find which kids were where as positive test results came in, Hager said. “So potentially there were students on campus that probably were sick.” It also appears the hack permanently wiped out a few days worth of attendance records and grades.

Edupoint, the vendor for Albuquerque's student information database, called Synergy, declined to comment.

Many schools choose to keep attacks under wraps or release minimal information to prevent revealing additional weaknesses in their security systems.

“It's very difficult for the school districts to learn from each other, because they're really not supposed to talk to each other about it because you might share vulnerabilities,” Elder said.

Last year, the FBI issued a warning about a group called PYSA, or “Protect Your System, Amigo,” saying it was seeing an increase in attacks by the group on schools, colleges and seminaries. Other ransomware gangs include Conti, which last year demanded \$40 million from Broward County Public Schools, one of the nation's largest.

Most are Russian-speaking groups that are based in Eastern Europe and enjoy safe harbor from tolerant governments. Some will post files on the dark web, including highly sensitive information, if they don't get paid.

While attacks on larger districts garner more headlines, ransomware gangs tended to target smaller school districts in 2021 than in 2020, according to Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the firm Emsisoft. He said that could indicate bigger districts are increasing their spending on cybersecurity while smaller districts, which have less money, remain more vulnerable.

A few days after Christmas, the 1,285-student district of Truth or Consequences, south of Albuquerque, also had its Synergy student information system shut down by a ransomware attack. Officials there compared it to having their house robbed.

“It's just that feeling of helplessness, of confusion as to why somebody would do something like this because at the end of the day, it's taking away from our kids. And to me that's just a disgusting way to try to, to get money,” Superintendent Channell Segura said.

The school didn't have to cancel classes because the attack happened on break, but the network remains down, including keyless entry locks on school building doors. Teachers are still carrying around the physical keys they had to track down at the start of the year, Segura said.

In October, President Joe Biden signed the K-12 Cybersecurity Act, which calls for the federal cyber security agency to make recommendations about how to help school systems better protect themselves.

	<p>New Mexico lawmakers have been slow to expand internet usage in the state, let alone support schools on cyber security. Last week, state representatives introduced a bill that would allocate \$45 million to the state education department to build a cybersecurity program by 2027.</p> <p>Ideas on how to prevent future hacks and recover from existing ones usually require more work from teachers.</p> <p>In the days following the Albuquerque attack, parents argued on Facebook over why schools couldn't simply switch to pen and paper for things like attendance and grades.</p> <p>Hager said she even heard the criticism from her mother, a retired school teacher.</p> <p>"I said, 'Mom, you can only take attendance on paper if you have printed out your roster to begin with,'" Hager said.</p> <p>Teachers could also keep duplicate paper copies of all records — but that would double the clerical work that already bogs them down.</p> <p>In an era where administrators increasingly require teachers to record everything digitally, Hager says, "these systems should work."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Bulgaria shuts online investment scam</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/bulgarian-authorities-take-down-online-scam-responsible-for-eur-10-million-losses/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/bulgarian-authorities-take-down-online-scam-responsible-for-eur-10-million-losses/</a>
GIST	<p>Judicial and law enforcement authorities in Bulgaria, supported by Europol and Eurojust, have taken down a network of online investment fraudsters involved in money laundering.</p> <p>On the action day on January 26, officers from the Bulgarian National Police arrested one suspect for defrauding mainly German and Greek investors of at least EUR 10 million. During the action day, a total of 24 locations were searched, while officers interrogated 66 witnesses in Sofia and Burgas. Furthermore, a variety of electronic equipment, financial information and recordings were seized.</p> <p>Europol deployed two experts on the ground in Bulgaria to facilitate the information exchange and provide real-time operational analysis and technical expertise. Eurojust coordinated the joint action day and provided cross-border judicial support. The national authorities deployed around one hundred officers and prosecutors during the action day.</p> <p>The scam was exposed after complaints were made by German and Greek investors who had lost all of the deposits they had invested in the online scam. The organized crime group responsible had set up websites and call centers that appeared to be legitimate but were actually fraudulent.</p> <p>The fraudulent activity was conducted by two call centers. While acting as financial consultants, call operators speaking German, Greek, English and Spanish contacted potential investors with promises of significant profits. As a result, several hundred victims made substantial investments but subsequently lost all of their money.</p> <p>In 2019, Bulgarian authorities started investigations and Eurojust set up a joint investigation team (JIT) between Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Serbia and Europol. Following five coordination meetings with Europol and Eurojust, the JIT members were able to identify the two fraudulent call centers in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian police, supported by the Serbian authorities, dismantled both call centers on the action day. In 2020, a similar modus operandi was used in another case and a coordinated action day led to <a href="#">the dismantling of two other call centers</a>.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<a href="#">Read more at Europol</a>



HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Qubit Finance hacked for \$80M</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cryptocurrency/smart-chain-financial-site-qubit-hacked-for-80-million">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cryptocurrency/smart-chain-financial-site-qubit-hacked-for-80-million</a>
GIST	<p>Decentralized finance (DeFi) is defying security hopes as Qubit Finance, a major <a href="#">decentralized digital finance</a> platform, was taken for \$80 million in cryptocurrency by cyber-thieves on Thursday.</p> <p>The largest crypto-hack so far this year was initially reported (and admitted by Qubit) in an <a href="#">incident report</a> released on Medium. The attack happened at approximately 5 p.m. Eastern on Jan. 27. Qubit Finance operate as a bridge between various blockchain providers, like a settlement processing provider might in more conventional financial services transactions, so that digital funds deposited into one type of cryptocurrency can be taken out through another type. Qubit specifically works as a “bridge” between Ethereum and the Binance Smart Chain (BSC) network.</p> <p>Early analysis from <a href="#">researchers at CertiK</a>, which audits cryptocurrency and blockchain enterprises, found that attackers had exploited a “security flaw” within the smart contract code of Qubit’s blockchain, which allowed them to deposit nothing and yet withdraw nearly \$80 million through Binance Coin.</p> <p>“As we move from an Ethereum-dominant world to a truly multi-chain world, bridges will only become more important,” <a href="#">CertiK analysts</a> wrote. “People need to move funds from one blockchain to another, but they need to do so in ways that are not susceptible to hackers who can steal more than [\$80 million].”</p> <p>The Qubit Finance team released its own statement on Twitter, pleading with the bad actors who stole the funds to negotiate with the blockchain finance go-between, so as to reduce financial impact for all the people who use the blockchain bridge. To that end, Qubit reportedly offered a <a href="#">bug bounty</a> of \$250,000 to the hackers to encourage them to return their stolen crypto-funds.</p> <p>Yesterday’s hack on Qubit Finance is the seventh largest criminal exploit experienced by a <a href="#">DeFi platform</a>, which depend on smart contracts as opposed to third parties for clearing and trading funds. Binance Smart Chain has been around less than two years, since April 2020, and has undergone several multi-million dollar attacks, including the \$88 million theft committed on Venus Finance last May, \$50 taken from Uranium Finance in April 2021, and \$31 million snagged by hackers from Meerkat Finance the month before that, March 2021.</p> <p>Keegan Francis, cryptocurrency and bitcoin specialist for Finder, believes that despite such attacks, cryptocurrency exchanges “are actually setting an amazing example for how financial security of the future will look.” While he admits that there have been numerous hacks of exchanges in the short time cryptocurrencies have been around, Francis says that “these hacks are happening less and less over time as the consequences for <a href="#">not implementing sufficient security</a> are permanent and catastrophic for the business. Exchanges have ended up implementing sophisticated compliance and security measures to ensure the security of their customers' money.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Most ransomware infections self-installed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/most-ransomware-infections-self/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/most-ransomware-infections-self/</a>
GIST	<p>New research from managed detection and response (MDR) provider <a href="#">Expel</a> found that most ransomware attacks in 2021 were self-installed.</p> <p>The finding was included in the company’s inaugural annual report on cybersecurity trends and predictions, <a href="#">Great eXpeltations</a>, published on Thursday.</p> <p>Researchers found eight out of ten ransomware infections occurred after victims unwittingly opened a zipped file containing malicious code. Abuse of third-party access accounted for 3% of all ransomware incidents, and 4% were caused by exploiting a software vulnerability on the perimeter.</p>

The report was based on the analysis of data aggregated from Expel's security operations center (SOC) concerning incidents spanning January 1 2021 to December 31 2021.

Other key findings were that 50% of incidents were BEC (business email compromise) attempts, with SaaS apps a top target.

More than 90% of those attacks were geared towards Microsoft O365, while assaults against Google Workspace accounted for fewer than 1% of incidents. The remaining 9% targeted Okta.

Ransomware attacks accounted for 13% of all opportunistic attacks. The five most targeted industries in descending order were legal services, communications, financial services, real estate and entertainment.

In addition, 35% of web app compromises Expel responded to resulted in the deployment of a crypto miner.

To protect against threats in 2022, Expel recommended implementing network layer controls to detect and block network communications to crypto mining pools and confirming event data recorder (EDR) coverage across all endpoints.

The company also advised forwarding computing resource alarms to a security information and event management (SIEM) software solution to flag overtaxed resources potentially deployed for crypto-jacking.

Other advice included defending the self-installation attack surface on Windows, deploying MFA everywhere, especially for remote access, patching and updating regularly and deploying EDR policies in block mode.

Users were also advised not to expose RDP (remote desktop protocol) directly to the internet.

"We founded Expel with a goal of bringing more transparency to security," said Dave Merkel, CEO of Expel, on Thursday.

"Today we reach a new milestone tied to that commitment – we're sharing the most important threats and trends our SOC identified last year and their advice on what to do about them."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 FBI warning on Iranian cyber company</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-issues-warning-over-iranian/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-issues-warning-over-iranian/</a>
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has issued a Private Industry Notice on protecting against malicious activity by Iranian cyber company Emennet Pasargad (formerly known as Eeleyanet Gostar).</p> <p>Two Iranian nationals employed by the company were <a href="#">indicted</a> on October 20 2021 by a grand jury in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York over their alleged involvement in a campaign to influence and interfere with the outcome of the 2020 US presidential election.</p> <p>Seyyed Mohammad Hosein Musa Kazemi and Sajjad Kashian were accused of conspiring with others to run a sophisticated campaign that included sending threatening emails to voters, hacking into the computer networks of an American media company and impersonating a far-right organization to cast doubt over the integrity of electoral ballots.</p> <p>The Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control <a href="#">sanctioned</a> Emennet, four members of the company's management team and Kazemi and Kashian for attempting to influence the same election.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Notice</a> states that Emennet also previously conducted cyber-enabled information operations that used a false flag persona to spread propaganda via text message.</p>

	<p>“According to FBI information, in late 2018, the group masqueraded as the ‘Yemen Cyber Army’ and crafted messaging critical of Saudi Arabia,” states the Notice.</p> <p>“Emennet also demonstrated interest in leveraging bulk SMS services, likely as a means to mass-disseminate propaganda or other messaging.”</p> <p>Included in the Notice was a summary of Emennet’s past tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), which included using virtual private network services to obfuscate the origin of their activity.</p> <p>Over the past three years, Emennet has selected potential victims by performing web searches for leading businesses in various sectors. The group would then scan the websites of the businesses that appeared in the search results for vulnerable software that could be exploited to establish persistent access.</p> <p>Information gathered by the FBI indicates that Emennet also attempted to leverage cyber intrusions conducted by other actors for its own benefit.</p> <p>“This includes searching for data hacked and leaked by other actors and attempting to identify webshells that may have been placed or used by other cyber-actors,” said the FBI.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Data center infrastructure software exposed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-20-000-data-center-management-systems-exposed-to-hackers/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-20-000-data-center-management-systems-exposed-to-hackers/</a>
GIST	<p>Researchers have found over 20,000 instances of publicly exposed data center infrastructure management (DCIM) software that monitor devices, HVAC control systems, and power distribution units, which could be used for a range of catastrophic attacks.</p> <p>Data centers house costly systems that support business storage solutions, operational systems, website hosting, data processing, and more.</p> <p>The buildings that host data centers must comply with strict safety regulations concerning fire protection, airflow, electric power, and physical security.</p> <p>Years of pursuing operational efficiency have introduced "lights-out" data centers, which are fully automated facilities managed remotely and generally operate without staff.</p> <p>However, the configuration of these systems isn't always correct. As a result, while the servers themselves may be adequately protected from physical access, the systems that ensure physical protection and optimal performance sometimes aren't.</p> <p><b>Multiple cases of unprotected systems</b></p> <p>Investigators at Cyble have found over 20,000 instances of publicly exposed DCIM systems, including thermal and cooling management dashboards, humidity controllers, UPS controllers, rack monitors, and transfer switches.</p> <p>Additionally, the analysts were able to extract passwords from dashboards which they then used to access actual database instances stored on the data center.</p> <p>The applications found by Cyble give full remote access to data center assets, provide status reports, and offer users the capacity to configure various system parameters.</p> <p>In most cases, the applications used default passwords or were severely outdated, allowing threat actors to compromise them or override security layers fairly easily.</p>

### Potential impact

Exposing these systems without adequate protection means that anyone could change the temperature and humidity thresholds, configure voltage parameters to dangerous levels, deactivate cooling units, turn consoles off, put UPS devices to sleep, create false alarms, or change backup time intervals.

These are all potentially dangerous acts that may result in physical damage, data loss, system destruction, and a significant economic impact on the targeted organizations and their clients.

An example of this is a fire incident in the Strasbourg-based [OVH data center in March 2021](#), caused by a failure in one of the building's UPS (uninterruptible power supply) units.

While that occurrence wasn't the result of hacking, it illustrates the magnitude of the damage that such attacks can cause to service providers and their customers.

The fire consumed thousands of servers, irreversibly wiped data, and caused service disruption to gaming servers, cryptocurrency exchanges, telecommunication firms, news outlets, and more.

Even if no physical harm is done, adversaries can use their access to DCIM systems to exfiltrate data or lock the real admins out and eventually extort the data center owner.

The implications, in any case, are dire, and closing these loopholes should be a priority. On that front, Cyble has informed the CERTs on each country where the exposed systems were located.

### Over 20,000 ILO interfaces exposed as well

In addition to exposed DCIM instances, security researcher and ISC Handler [Jan Kopriva](#) found [over 20,000 servers with exposed ILO management interfaces](#).

HPE Integrated Lights-Out (iLO) management interfaces are used to provide remote low-level access to a server, allowing administrators to remotely power off, power on, reboot, and manage servers as if they were physically in front of them.

However, if not correctly secured, threat actors will now have complete access to servers at a pre-boot level, allowing them to modify the operating system or even hardware settings.

Like DCIM interfaces, it is critical to secure ILO interfaces properly and not expose them directly to the Internet to protect them from remote exploitation of vulnerabilities and password brute force attacks.

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HEADLINE	01/30 FTC: \$770M lost in social media fraud surge
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ftc-americans-lost-770-million-from-social-media-fraud-surge/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ftc-americans-lost-770-million-from-social-media-fraud-surge/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Americans are increasingly targeted by scammers on social media, according to tens of thousands of reports received by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2021.</p> <p>As revealed by the FTC, over 95,000 US consumers reported losses of roughly \$770 million after getting scammed on social media platforms.</p> <p>This amounts to approximately a quarter of all losses to fraud reported in 2021, showing a massive 18-fold increase over 2017 reported losses and more than double compared to 2020.</p> <p>"More than one in four people who reported losing money to fraud in 2021 said it started on social media with an ad, a post, or a message. In fact, the data suggest that social media was far more profitable to scammers in 2021 than any other method of reaching people." the FTC said.</p>

"It's a low-cost way to reach billions of people from anywhere in the world. It's easy to manufacture a fake persona, or scammers can hack into an existing profile to get 'friends' to con."

### Top social media scams of 2021

The most profitable social media scams were those promoting bogus investment opportunities, with more than half of reports in 2021 mentioning money and cryptocurrency lost to promises of huge returns.

Romance scams were the second most profitable fraud on social media after reaching record highs during the last years.

However, the most significant number of scam reports linked to social media were sent by people who lost money to online shopping scams where marketed products were not delivered.

"In nearly 70% of these reports, people said they placed an order, usually after seeing an ad, but never got the merchandise," the FTC [added](#).

"Some reports even described ads that impersonated real online retailers that drove people to lookalike websites."

In November, the FBI also alerted online shoppers that they [risk losing over \\$53 million to holiday scams](#) after warning Americans in April 2020 that [sharing personal info online will only help scammers](#).

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HEADLINE	01/28 US government wants your selfies
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/irs-us-government-wants-selfies/">https://www.wired.com/story/irs-us-government-wants-selfies/</a>
GIST	<p><b>IN NOVEMBER, THE</b> Internal Revenue Service <a href="#">launched an online security system</a> that uses <a href="#">face recognition</a> to confirm a person's identity. Public attention to the project last week triggered an outcry. The ACLU called the project "<a href="#">deeply troubling</a>," saying face recognition "has been shown to be less accurate for people of color."</p> <p>Some IRS functions, like scheduling payments—but not filing taxes—now require first-time users to verify their identity with Virginia startup ID.me, which also works with 27 state employment agencies and the Veterans Administration. The process involves photographing a government-issued ID and uploading a video selfie so <a href="#">algorithms</a> can match face and document.</p> <p>ID.me has said it uses algorithms ranked highly in US government tests of face recognition and offers alternatives for people who can't get through its automated checks. But the company's CEO stoked distrust Wednesday when <a href="#">he said</a> the company uses face recognition more widely than previously disclosed.</p> <p>One certainty amid the dispute: Submitting selfies to access online government services is set to stay—and spread. It's required by US federal <a href="#">security guidelines from 2017</a> that aim to prevent fraud.</p> <p>"Many elements of ID.me's enrollment process are effectively set in stone," says Cameron D'Ambrosi, managing director with Liminal, a research firm that helps companies with digital identity projects.</p> <p>More than 20 federal agencies, including the Social Security Administration, use a digital identity system called <a href="#">Login.gov</a> run by the General Services Administration. It's built on <a href="#">services</a> from <a href="#">LexisNexis</a> and can use selfies for account verification. The GSA's director of technology transformation services Dave Zvenyach says facial recognition is being tested for fairness and accessibility and not yet used when people access government services through <a href="#">Login.gov</a>. The GSA's administrator <a href="#">said last year</a> that 30 million citizens have <a href="#">Login.gov</a> accounts and that it expects the number to grow significantly as more agencies adopt the system.</p>

“ID.me is supplying something many governments ask for and require companies to do,” says Elizabeth Goodman, who previously worked on Login.gov and is now senior director of design at federal contractor A1M Solutions.

Countries including the UK, New Zealand, and Denmark use similar processes to ID.me’s to establish digital identities used to access government services. Many international security standards are broadly in line with those of the US, written by the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Goodman says that such programs need to provide offline options such as visiting a post office for people unable or unwilling to use phone apps or internet services. Making any digital service universally accessible in a large and varied nation like the US is a challenge. An agency like the IRS has to serve a user base similar in scale to that of a large tech company, but unlike a hot startup must also include society’s least connected. “Usable security is really, really hard,” Goodman says. The US government’s track record on digital inclusion is mixed. ID.me says it has 650 locations where people can complete enrollment in person—a small number in a big country.

Services like Login.gov and ID.me are underpinned by NIST Special Publication 800-63-3 from 2017, an [overdue overhaul](#) of guidelines for passwords and other digital identity protections for a time of sophisticated computer crime.

That document recommends encouraging people to use long, memorable passwords rather than forcing them to frequently change them or specifying they include special characters. It also lays down tougher ground rules for providing remote access to systems like those of the IRS and many other agencies with sensitive data.

In person, government departments generally ask for a photo ID like a driver’s license. Online or over the phone, many agencies have previously verified identity by asking for information that could be checked against a person’s government file or credit report. But harvesting the personal data needed to spoof that kind of check has become easier in the era of [social networks](#) and mass data breaches.

NIST’s 2017 standard says that access to systems that can leak sensitive data or harm public programs should require verifying a person’s identity by comparing them to a photo—either remotely or in person—or using biometrics such as a fingerprint scanner. It says that a remote check can be done either by video with a trained agent, or using software that checks for an ID’s authenticity and the “liveness” of a person’s photo or video.

ID.me was well positioned to take advantage of the new standards, which federal agencies [must](#) comply with. The company was founded in 2010 as a deals website for veterans and active military and developed a system for checking military IDs used by the Department of Veterans Affairs. It won millions of dollars in federal grants to explore new approaches to digital identity that helped inform the 2017 standards and became the [first company](#) accredited as compliant with them. In 2019, ID.me signed a [contract](#) with the VA that has so far paid out more than \$30 million.

During the pandemic ID.me has won a surge of new business—and scrutiny. States hired ID.me to screen claims for Covid-19 aid that overwhelmed many employment departments. But nonprofits and lawmakers have complained about its use of face recognition and said some vulnerable citizens can’t get through the company’s checks. California’s Employment Development Department said that ID.me [blocked](#) more than 350,000 fraudulent claims in the last three months of 2020. But the [state auditor](#) said an estimated 20 percent of legitimate claimants were unable to verify their identities with ID.me.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Spotify on complaints Covid misinformation
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=style&amp;live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#spotify-joe-rogan-covid-misinformation-statement">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests?type=style&amp;live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#spotify-joe-rogan-covid-misinformation-statement</a>



GIST	<p>The chief executive of Spotify responded on Sunday to growing complaints from musicians and listeners over the role of Joe Rogan, the streaming service's star podcaster, in spreading what has been widely criticized as misinformation about the coronavirus. Last week, <a href="#">Neil Young</a> and <a href="#">Joni Mitchell</a> — two musical icons whose cultural influence is far greater than their streaming numbers — removed their music from Spotify to protest the platform's support of Rogan.</p> <p>"We know we have a critical role to play in supporting creator expression while balancing it with the safety of our users," the CEO, Daniel Ek, who is also one of Spotify's founders, wrote in a <a href="#">public letter</a>. "In that role, it is important to me that we don't take on the position of being content censor while also making sure that there are rules in place and consequences for those who violate them."</p> <p>Ek made no specific mention of Rogan, who has drawn complaints for his interviews with vaccine skeptics. This month, a group of more than 200 professors and public health officials called on Spotify to crack down on Covid-19 misinformation on its platform, and pointed to a recent episode of Rogan's podcast featuring Dr. Robert Malone, an infectious-disease expert, that included "several falsehoods about Covid-19 vaccines," according to the experts' letter.</p> <p>Last week, Young and Mitchell cited those complaints when removing their music from Spotify, sparking debate throughout the music industry about what role artists can have in deciding where their music is heard. Young called Spotify "the home of life threatening Covid misinformation"; Mitchell wrote, "Irresponsible people are spreading lies that are costing people their lives." In response, many users have swarmed social media to show support for Young and Mitchell and to say they were canceling their subscriptions to Spotify, though the service has not said how many accounts were canceled.</p> <p>More widely, the issue has ignited new debate over questions about free speech on the internet and about political polarization in the coronavirus era. Technology and social media platforms, like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, have been widely accused of playing a prominent role in spreading untruths about the virus and the vaccines to prevent it. But some free speech advocates have also defended those outlets for allowing open debate, and services like Facebook and YouTube have <a href="#">touted their records</a> of <a href="#">taking down</a> what they view as clear misinformation.</p> <p>Ek said that Spotify would add a "content advisory" notice to any podcast episode that includes a discussion about the coronavirus, directing listeners to a "<a href="#">Covid-19 hub</a>" with facts and information. That hub includes links to health authorities like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as podcasts from news sources like the BBC, CNN and ABC News. Rogan, a comedian and actor, signed an exclusive podcast deal with Spotify in 2020 that has been reported to be worth \$100 million, though Spotify has not confirmed that figure. His show is the most popular on Spotify.</p> <p>Ek also wrote that for the first time, the service is <a href="#">publishing its platform rules</a>, which address dangerous, deceptive, sensitive and illegal content. Among them are rules barring "content that promotes dangerous false or dangerous deceptive medical information that may cause offline harm or poses a direct threat to public health," including denial of the existence of Covid-19 or that "promoting or suggesting that vaccines approved by local health authorities are designed to cause death."</p> <p>On Wednesday, when Spotify began removing Young's music, the company said that it has "removed over 20,000 podcast episodes related to Covid since the start of the pandemic." Rogan's episode with Dr. Malone remains available on Spotify.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Finland diplomats' phones hacked; spyware
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/technology-middle-east-israel-software-hacking-33c8e47909ea208b6b4efe81d965407e">https://apnews.com/article/technology-middle-east-israel-software-hacking-33c8e47909ea208b6b4efe81d965407e</a>
GIST	STOCKHOLM (AP) — The mobile devices of Finnish diplomats working abroad have been hacked with the use of sophisticated spyware, Finland's government said Friday, and the Nordic country's spy chief said a "state actor" was likely to blame.



	<p>The Finnish Foreign Ministry said the victims were targeted through Pegasus software developed by Israeli spyware company NSO Group. The software can seamlessly infiltrate a mobile phone and allow its operators to gain access to the device's contents and location history.</p> <p>"The highly sophisticated malware has infected users' Apple or Android telephones without their noticing and without any action from the user's part," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement which was also tweeted. "Through the spyware, the perpetrators may have been able to harvest data from the device and exploit its features."</p> <p>Jarmo Sareva, Finland's Ambassador for Cyber Security, would not disclose the data harvested, but said under government protocols information transmitted by phone must be public or classified at the lowest level.</p> <p>"As you know Pegasus spyware does take the phone under its control," Sareva said. "Even the microphone and camera of these devices were being spied on."</p> <p>He wouldn't say how many diplomats were targeted or in which countries they were stationed.</p> <p>Asked who was believed to be behind the cyber espionage he said: "We have our suspicions of course," but declined to elaborate.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Artists sound alarm: NFT crime proliferates</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/global/2022/jan/29/huge-mess-of-theft-artists-sound-alarm-theft-nfts-proliferates">https://www.theguardian.com/global/2022/jan/29/huge-mess-of-theft-artists-sound-alarm-theft-nfts-proliferates</a>
GIST	<p>When Lois van Baarle, a Dutch artist, scoured the biggest NFT marketplace for her name late last year, she found more than 100 pieces of her art for sale. None of them had been put up by her.</p> <p>Van Baarle is a popular digital artist, with millions of followers on social media. She's one of a growing number of artists who have had online images of their art stolen, minted as unique digital assets on a blockchain, and offered up to trade in cryptocurrency on the NFT platform OpenSea.</p> <p>The rise in such thefts comes as the market for non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, exploded last year, growing to an <a href="#">estimated \$22bn</a>, attracting Sotheby's and Christie's, and driving <a href="#">multimillion-dollar auctions</a> for these new certificates of ownership of digital assets.</p> <p>OpenSea has grown at a dizzying pace, and is now valued at \$13bn. But amid its spectacular rise, the company is doing far too little to prevent the trade in fraudulent NFTs, some artists charge, and is placing much of the burden of policing art fraud on the artists themselves.</p> <p>OpenSea said in a statement: "It is against our policy to sell NFTs using plagiarized content," adding that it regularly delisted and banned accounts that did so. The company said it was working to build new image recognition and other tools that would quickly recognize stolen content and protect creators, and that it planned to launch some of them in the first half of this year.</p> <p><b>A boon and nightmare for artists</b></p> <p>In theory, blockchain technology was supposed to make it easier for digital artists to sell unique tokens of ownership, offering buyers a permanent record of ownership linked to the work.</p> <p>For some artists, the technology opened up a new way to earn money : Kenny Schachter, a New York-based video artist and art writer, embraced NFTs early and said he has made hundreds of thousands of dollars in the past year, after three decades working within an art world in which video art rarely sold.</p>

“We’re in an incredible mushrooming of opportunity for digital artists,” said Schachter. “It’s 1,000% better than a year ago, two years ago, when there was no marketplace for any of this art.”

But other artists say that the past year’s crypto boom has been a nightmare. Among the problems is that anyone can “mint” a digital file as an NFT, whether or not they have rights to it in the first place, and the process is anonymous by default.

“It is much easier to make forgeries in the blockchain space than in the traditional art world. It’s as simple as right-click, save,” said Tina Rivers Ryan, a curator and expert in digital art at the Albright-Knox gallery in Buffalo, New York. “It’s also harder to fight forgers. How do you sue the anonymous holder of a crypto wallet? In which jurisdiction?”

DeviantArt, a decades-old online community for digital artists that hosts half a billion pieces of digital art, began monitoring the blockchain for copies of their users’ work last fall after NFTs based on stolen work by Qing Han, a [beloved artist who died in 2020 after publicly chronicling her struggle with cancer](#), were found for sale on OpenSea.

DeviantArt has sent 90,000 alerts about possible fraud to thousands of their users since then, company executives said. It’s now scanning for fraud across 4m newly minted NFTs each week. The number of alerts doubled from October to November, and grew by 300% from November to mid-December.

In December, bots began attacking the site, Moti Levy, DeviantArt’s chief operations officer said, scraping whole galleries of artists’ works. The pieces would later appear on NFT marketplaces, often with artists’ names and watermarks still attached.

The attacks have focused on DeviantArt’s most popular artists, measured by likes and comments, Levy said, rather than any particular aesthetic.

“Bots are bots,” he said.

#### **‘How much of their valuation is from stolen art?’**

Aja Trier, a Texas-based artist who has found viral fame for painting riffs on Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* featuring various breeds of dog, said she discovered 87,000 NFTs based on images of her work for sale on OpenSea, many of them priced at \$9.88 each.

Trier said 500 listings of her stolen work were added in a single night, suggesting the theft was being automated and carried out by bots.

The recourse she has as the legitimate creator of the work, she said, is to write individual copyright infringement takedown requests to OpenSea and to manually monitor for new fraudulent listings – all time-consuming work.

The most effective way to get the company to take down their stolen work, Trier and several other artists said, has been by tweeting angrily about the problem or talking to media outlets.

At least 37 NFTs made based on Trier’s stolen work were bought before OpenSea took down the fraudulent listings, Trier said, and she has not seen any of that money come back to her, even though OpenSea makes a 2.5% commission on each sale.

“It seems to me that they’re making some money on illicit behavior,” Trier said. “They have a \$13bn valuation and they’re trying to go public. How much of their valuation is from stolen art?”

The kind of fraud artists were complaining about made up only a small fraction of its transactions, OpenSea said. It took enforcement action on 3,500 collections of NFTs every week for counterfeit or copyright reasons, it said, which represents 0.175% of the platform’s more than 2m total collections. It said the site now lists more than 80m individual NFTs.

But the problem of plagiarism, whatever its scale, was an important one, the company acknowledged: “We are constantly evaluating new ways to do our part.”

#### **‘One huge mess of theft and fraud and inauthenticity’**

The current reporting process for artists whose stolen work is turned into NFTs is confusing and laborious, confirmed Ashli Weiss, a Silicon Valley lawyer who specializes in intellectual property and works with blockchain companies, adding that there is currently little incentive for OpenSea and other marketplaces to fix the problem. “OpenSea is getting paid with each transaction.”

OpenSea disputed the view that it did not have an incentive to tackle art theft and plagiarism: “For more people to join OpenSea or other Web3 communities, these issues must be addressed head-on,” a spokesperson said.

More than half of the company’s current staff works either full-time or extensively on issues of plagiarism and content moderation, OpenSea said, and it is developing “smart moderation” tools to speed up the company’s response to reports of plagiarism.

But the company also defended some of the policies that artists would like to change as essential to its mission. While some artists would like to see a crackdown on bots, creating hundreds or thousands of NFTs at one time is normal for the space, OpenSea said, noting that there are [10,000 “Bored Apes”](#) and [more than 8,000 “Pudgy Penguins”](#), two of the most prominent and commercially successful NFT collections.

Van Baarle, the Dutch digital artist, said that she has seen OpenSea’s process for reporting art fraud improve somewhat over the past year. In the early months of trying to flag her stolen art on the platform the site had a “report” button that never generated any response to her at all. By late December, she said, it had introduced a reporting form that made it substantially easier to log the fraud, and each attempt at least generated an email response.

But the company can still do more to verify an NFT’s legitimacy before the token is offered up for sale, she said, rather than having artists play whack-a-mole with an endless sequence of anonymous grifters.

“For a concept that is supposedly about authenticity, to me it looks like the opposite,” Van Baarle said. “From where I’m standing, it looks like one huge mess of theft and fraud and inauthenticity.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 FAA clears more 5G towers as operational</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/28/faa-clears-verizon-and-att-to-turn-on-more-5g-cell/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/28/faa-clears-verizon-and-att-to-turn-on-more-5g-cell/</a>
GIST	<p>Federal safety regulators say they have cleared the way for Verizon and AT&amp;T to power up more towers for new 5G service without causing radio interference with airplanes.</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration said Friday that it took the steps after receiving details from the telecommunications companies about the location of wireless transmitters.</p> <p>The FAA’s move will let the companies activate 5G cell towers closer to airports without hindering the ability of planes to land during poor weather.</p> <p>Verizon and AT&amp;T declined to comment. Nick Ludlum, a spokesman for the telecommunications trade group CTIA, called it a “positive development that highlights the considerable progress the wireless industry, aviation industry, FAA and FCC are making to ensure robust 5G service and safe flights.”</p> <p>The trade group Airlines for America issued a similar statement. Spokesman Carter Yang added that all sides are working on “a more efficient permanent solution” that will avoid disrupting air traffic as more 5G towers are activated.</p>

	<p>Aviation groups and the FAA had warned that the companies' 5G service, which uses part of the radio spectrum called C-Band, was too close to the spectrum range used by instruments that measure the height of planes above the ground - crucial information for landing in low visibility.</p> <p>Verizon and AT&amp;T, which spent billions to build 5G networks, disputed the FAA's conclusions. But they twice agreed to delay launching new 5G and temporarily delayed it around many airports even as they began offering the service in many U.S. cities on Jan. 19.</p> <p>Since the dispute came to a head earlier this month, the FAA has cleared most types of airline planes - 90% of the U.S. fleet - to operate around 5G signals, saying that their height-measuring devices, called radio altimeters, are safe from radio interference.</p> <p>Dire predictions of thousands of canceled flights did not come true, but dozens of flights have been grounded by 5G concerns, including U.S.-bound international flights last week and some domestic flights this week at Paine Field near Seattle. Some small airline planes, notably a group of Embraer regional jets, have not been cleared.</p> <p>"It's too early to declare victory," Faye Malarkey Black, president of the Regional Airline Association, said earlier this week. "This is not fixed. We're not fixed."</p> <p>Regional airlines - smaller companies that operate flights under contract with large airlines - faced limitations on a large chunk of their fleets during poor weather, Black said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Intel community acquired NGO spyware?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/28/us-accused-procuring-israeli-spyware-surveils-thro/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/28/us-accused-procuring-israeli-spyware-surveils-thro/</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. intelligence community is accused of acquiring spyware technology from the Israeli tech firm NSO Group that could snoop on just about anyone through their smartphone.</p> <p>The alleged procurement of the technology came before the Biden administration blacklisted the tech last year.</p> <p>NSO Group's Pegasus product allows access to a smartphone user's messages, camera, and microphone without action by the victim, according to the Pegasus Project, an investigation organized by the news outlet Forbidden Stories. Pegasus has attracted attention from surveillance-focused watchdogs and from governments interested in becoming users.</p> <p>In 2019, the FBI obtained the technology but has not used it, according to a report from The New York Times.</p> <p>The FBI told The Washington Times there was no operational use of the tech in support of any investigation and it procured a limited license for "product testing and evaluation only."</p> <p>"The FBI works diligently to stay abreast of emerging technologies and tradecraft—not just to explore a potential legal use but also to combat crime and to protect both the American people and our civil liberties," the FBI said in a statement. "That means we routinely identify, evaluate, and test technical solutions and problems for a variety of reasons, including possible operational and security concerns they might pose in the wrong hands."</p> <p>Details about American law enforcement and national security agencies' relationship with NSO Group have been murky. According to the report, the CIA arranged and paid for Djibouti to acquire the Pegasus product to assist in anti-terrorism efforts. The CIA declined to comment.</p> <p>The NSO Group has faced a publicity nightmare in recent years as watchdogs and investigators have uncovered how their spyware technology has been used. The Toronto-based research group Citizen Lab alleged in 2018 that Pegasus spyware technology was used in operations in 45 countries.</p>

Last September, Citizen Lab published a report about an NSO Group exploit affecting Apple devices, and Apple subsequently issued a security update.

The Biden administration sought to blacklist the NSO Group in November 2021 by adding it to the Commerce Department's "Entity List," which details foreign people and enterprises facing restrictions on their business as a result of national security concerns.

The NSO Group did not respond to a request for comment on Friday.

An NSO spokesperson previously said that the firm would advocate for the blacklisting decision to be overturned and noted that, "our technologies support U.S. national security interests and policies by preventing terrorism and crime."

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HEADLINE	01/28 New smartphone app for earthquake alerts
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/App-gives-Washington-quake-alerts-16813964.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/App-gives-Washington-quake-alerts-16813964.php</a>
GIST	<p>Smartphone users in <a href="#">Washington</a> can now get potentially life-saving alerts thanks to the MyShake app, which issues push notifications to devices when an earthquake is detected.</p> <p>The free app, available for iOS and Android, was designed by seismologists and engineers at the University of California, Berkeley. It's designed to alert users to danger seconds before the resulting shaking from an earthquake starts.</p> <p>In <a href="#">a news release</a> about the app's launch in Washington — it was previously available only in California and Oregon — Maximilian Dixon, the geologic hazards supervisor for the Washington Emergency Management Division, said the app could prove significant in helping people avoid injury.</p> <p>"Getting seconds of warning before an earthquake strikes may not sound like much, but it is plenty of time to drop, cover and hold on to protect yourself," he said. "Practicing how to drop, cover and hold on as soon as you get an alert, or feel earthquake shaking, will help you to do it even faster."</p> <p>The app uses data collected by the U.S. Geological Survey's earthquake warning system — called <a href="#">ShakeAlert</a> — which utilizes 1,150 seismometers to scan the West Coast for quakes. About 230 seismometers in Washington contribute information to that system.</p> <p>When seismometers detect the initial, fast-moving P-waves of an earthquake, scientists will determine its location and the ShakeAlert system will predict its size and strength. If the quake looks to be above a certain magnitude, users of the MyShake app will hopefully be notified before the slower, more destructive S-waves of the quake hit the area.</p> <p>Earthquake alerts for Washington residents <a href="#">have been available since May</a>, but only for Android users — those devices come with a separate, built-in alert system — and for those signed up to receive Wireless Emergency Alerts. The latter system is the same system used to issue AMBER alerts.</p> <p>Now, with the MyShake app, earthquake alerts are available to everyone in Washington with a smartphone. It's available through the <a href="#">Apple</a> or <a href="#">Google Play</a> app stores. It's been downloaded nearly 2 million times since its inception in 2019.</p> <p>The app has successfully delivered alerts to users before shaking for several California earthquakes since its official release there. Most recently, it provided warnings to about half a million phones for a magnitude 6.2 earthquake near Petrolia, California, on Dec. 20.</p> <p>The app will notify users if an earthquake with a magnitude of at least 4.5 is detected near their area. That's relatively weak by earthquake standards.</p>

	<p>Generally, earthquakes between 2.5 and 5.4 in magnitude can be felt but won't cause much damage, if any. Quakes that range between 5.5 and 6.0 will likely cause damage, and anything that registers at 6.1 or above could cause significant destruction.</p> <p>The last earthquake in Washington that registered above 6.1 in magnitude was the <a href="#">2001 Nisqually Earthquake</a>. Occurring deep below the southern region of the Puget Sound, that 6.8 quake injured several hundred people and caused between \$1 billion and \$4 billion in property damage.</p>
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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 US calls for hostage release in Afghanistan</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/biden-calls-for-release-of-us-hostage-in-afghanistan/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/biden-calls-for-release-of-us-hostage-in-afghanistan/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Sunday called for the release of U.S. Navy veteran Mark Frerichs, who was taken hostage in Afghanistan nearly two years ago.</p> <p>Frerichs, a civil engineer and contractor from Lombard, Illinois, was kidnapped in January 2020 from the capital of Kabul. He is believed to be in the custody of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network.</p> <p>“Threatening the safety of Americans or any innocent civilians is always unacceptable, and hostage-taking is an act of particular cruelty and cowardice,” President Joe Biden said in a statement to mark the second anniversary of the kidnapping on Monday. “The Taliban must immediately release Mark before it can expect any consideration of its aspirations for legitimacy. This is not negotiable.”</p> <p>The statement came as Afghanistan faces a thorny humanitarian crisis following the U.S. withdrawal in August. The Taliban quickly seized control of much of the country and the foreign aid that been flowing into the country largely halted, putting at risk the lives of millions of Afghans who could starve or freeze to death.</p> <p>Charlene Cakora, Frerichs’ sister, issued a statement saying that her family is “grateful” for Biden’s words.</p> <p>“But what we really want is to have Mark home,” she said. “We know the president has options in front of him to make that happen and hope Mark’s safe return will become a priority for him personally.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 ISIS expansion w/affiliate in Mozambique</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-expansion-with-affiliate-in-mozambique-increases-terrorist-groups-threat/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-expansion-with-affiliate-in-mozambique-increases-terrorist-groups-threat/</a>
GIST	<p>Large-scale terrorist attacks similar to those perpetrated against the United States on September 11, 2001, have since declined, leading perhaps to a sense of complacency among Western countries that the threat of terrorism on home soil is low and that global efforts to counter terrorism have been successful. Such thinking, however, may be misguided. While both al-Qaeda and ISIS have failed to do notable attacks in the Western world, both terrorist organizations have increased their capacity to do so. Both groups also have competed against each other to expand their influence in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. While some groups in Syria, Somalia, and Mali have preferred to operate under the banner of al-Qaeda; all other groups in West Africa, North Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East have convened under the flag of ISIS.</p> <p>One of the more recent additions to the ISIS “family” operates in Mozambique. Originally organized as Ansar al Sunna, ISIS-Mozambique is an example of how ISIS-Core can exploit a country’s ongoing economic and political grievances by adopting the ISIS model of controlling territory and using indiscriminate violence and brutality to increase its size and range compared to al-Qaeda. The evolution of</p>



Ansar al Sunna into ISIS-Mozambique is an example of how a local group can make headlines around the world by pledging allegiance to ISIS. This article examines the brief history of terrorism in Mozambique and how an ISIS-affiliated jihadist group became such a dominant player in the political, economic and social affairs of Mozambique.

### **History and Causes of Terrorism**

Mozambique [endured](#) decades of civil war, from 1977 to 1992, between the ruling Marxist Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the anti-communist insurgent forces of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). The conflict resulted in economic turmoil, the death of more than one million people, and the displacement of thousands of individuals and families. The years that followed, however, were not peaceful either. Both sides in the conflict committed record acts of violence. The only difference was that now the Mozambique National Resistance Movement Army (MNRM) represented the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), while the Mozambique Liberation Front (MLF) fought for FRELIMO.

The Global Terrorism Database recorded 525 violent acts that could qualify as terrorist incidents between 1978 and 2019. The same database recorded only four incidents between 2000 and 2012; however, the number of such incidents surged in 2013 and continued through subsequent years. Figure 1 shows the cumulative total number of attacks committed by the three main terrorist groups in Mozambique between 2013 and 2019. The MNRM, which historically had committed the most terrorist attacks, was replaced by Ansar al Sunna/ISIS-Mozambique as the leading perpetrator.

Today, the insurgency is perpetrated by Muslim groups in Cabo Delgado, a province of vast forests and immense mineral reserves, and [fueled](#) by legitimate economic and political grievances. Cabo Delgado has remained one of the poorest provinces in the country. The residents of the region have been mistreated by the central government and lack the benefits of the recent large-scale development of natural resources, including major natural gas investments.

The common belief is that the government is serving the economic interests of the country's elites while ignoring the lower class and driving them off their land. The government's military forces exacerbate the problem by overreacting to dissent and responding by committing abhorrent violent acts against civilians, which in turn leads to a violent backlash from the community. At the heart of the ongoing grievances is rampant government corruption. National officials are known to be involved in trading illicit gems, wildlife, and drugs.

The FRELIMO-led government is incapable of handling the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. It describes the issue as a solely foreign-driven and Islamist-centered terrorist movement, totally ignoring the economic dimensions of the problem. International pressure has pushed the government to address economic grievances in the region in exchange for foreign aid to the Mozambican government. However, the international community has questioned the handling of monetary aid due to issues with transparency and efficacy on the part of the local government.

### **From Ansar al Sunna to ISIS-Mozambique**

Jihadist groups around the world have declared loyalty and pledged allegiance to either al-Qaeda or ISIS. These smaller groups are aware that such alliances provide them with multiple benefits, including increased popularity in their operational territory, greater opportunity for funding and the recruitment of followers, and recognition on a larger scale. The Annex of Statistical Information listed a number of jihadist groups being the franchises of either Al Qaeda or ISIS in [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#). According to these lists, ISIS has more franchises than al-Qaeda, and jihadist groups in Africa mostly prefer to be under the banner of ISIS.

The first attack by Ansar al Sunna, also known locally as Al Shabaab (which does not have links to the Al Shabaab group operating in Somalia), was recorded in 2017. The group [pledged](#) allegiance to ISIS in 2018 and increased its operational capacity in the following years (see Figure 2). ISIS-Core acknowledged Ansar al Sunna as an affiliate in August 2019.



Ansar al Sunna's goal in affiliating with ISIS was increased access to resources and an increase in popularity. Today, the Mozambique branch of ISIS has stronger [relationships](#) with ISIS-Core, which provides the smaller group with advice on communication, marketing, and strategy. ISIS militants in Mozambique are using more operational techniques that are similar to those of the core organization. Foreign fighters – including Tanzanians, Congolese, or Somalians – have joined ISIS in Mozambique. As a result, ISIS-Mozambique now [consists](#) of local fighters aggrieved with poverty and wealth redistribution in Cabo Delgado, and of seasoned international jihadists who are under the influence of the ISIS-Core ideology.

According to the [U.S. Department](#) of State, ISIS-Mozambique killed more than 1,300 civilians between October 2017 and February 2021, and the group's attacks resulted in the displacement of nearly 670,000 persons in northern Mozambique. In the [2020](#) Annex of Statistical Information, ISIS-Mozambique was listed as one of the top 10 known perpetrators responsible for the most fatalities worldwide. It is the leading organization, with a 562 percent increase in the number of fatalities between 2019 and 2020. The number of incidents increased 770 percent in the same period.

### **ISIS-Mozambique's Capacity**

ISIS-Mozambique is highly capable of carrying out attacks on strategic targets in Mozambique and typically targets infrastructure (including power supplies), state institutions, and government buildings. Common tactics in [2020](#) were shootings (38 percent of attacks), followed by targeted murders (28 percent of attacks), extortion (24 percent of attacks), and property damage (21 percent of attacks). The most prominent victim types were general population (61 percent of attacks) and military (9 percent of attacks). Only 5 percent of ISIS-Mozambique attacks resulted in the loss of militants, which shows that its own militants are highly trained and capable of fighting against the Mozambican military.

Since its inception, ISIS-Mozambique has been the perpetrator of notable attacks in the country. After targeting a police station in a 2017 attack, the group in 2019 (thanks to its allegiance to ISIS) [upgraded its tactics](#), transitioning from common melee weapons (such as spears, lances, swords, daggers, axes, clubs, and other pointed, edged, and blunt weapons) to advanced lethal weapons (such as automatic guns and rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars).

In 2020, the group was able to defeat the Mozambican army and take control of the strategic port of Mocímboa da Praia after five days of intense fighting. Through the use of a hearts-and-minds approach, which is a common strategy for al-Qaeda and ISIS-affiliated groups in the Sahel, the ISIS-Mozambique militants distributed money and food to locals after robbing banks. The group showed its brutal face in November 2020 when it beheaded several civilians in two incidents. The first incident involved the beheading of 11 children in front of their mothers. In the second incident, the group beheaded around 50 civilians in a football pitch. It should be noted that the lead author's database on beheadings by terrorist organizations between 2014 and 2020 [showed](#) that ISIS-Mozambique is one of the top three violent ISIS franchises in the world.

In January 2021, the group was more strategic, specifically targeting the French energy giant Total. In March 2021, the group continued its attacks and [took over](#) Palma, a town on the northeast coast of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Province, with the involvement of its 200 fighters. The siege took four days, and the militants killed at least dozens of local people and destroyed the town's infrastructure, banks, and a police station. ISIS-Mozambique carries out most of its terrorist attacks in Mozambique; however, one attack in 2020 was a [joint operation](#) with the involvement of 300 ISIS militants in Tanzania that resulted in 22 fatalities.

### **What Needs to Be Done?**

The 2021 [Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community predicted](#) that terrorism in eastern Africa would continue to thrive, especially in countries with unstable governments. In addition to Al Shabaab in Somalia, ISIS-Mozambique threatens regional and global security in eastern Africa. Its group composition, operational capacity, and strong networks with ISIS-Core are indicators that ISIS-Mozambique will actively continue its attacks in the region.

	Major interventions by the Mozambican government are needed to address the root causes of the conflict in Cabo Delgado. Until residents in northern regions of Mozambique have a sense that they are no longer being discriminated against politically and economically, they will continue to resort to violence and their unmet grievances will create opportunities for ISIS to strengthen its franchise in the country. Moreover, counterterrorism operations by the Mozambican army and local and foreign mercenaries have been ineffective so far. The international community needs to be more active and should give its support to the Mozambican government. For example, the U.S. Africa Command and its partner organizations need to strengthen local defense capabilities, which will empower Mozambique in its struggle against ISIS-Core and ISIS-Mozambique. Specifically, the command and its partners should develop enhanced counterterrorism strategies that include (1) improvements to the local communications infrastructure, (2) efforts to deter the recruitment of insurgents, (3) the encouragement of community organizing, (4) the empowerment of civil society, and (5) the expansion of pan-African partnerships.
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HEADLINE	01/31 Fake passports for ISIS to enter Europe, US
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/31/revealed-how-fake-passports-allow-is-members-to-enter-europe-and-us">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/31/revealed-how-fake-passports-allow-is-members-to-enter-europe-and-us</a>
GIST	<p>A booming online industry specialising in fake passports with official visas and travel stamps is offering people with links to <a href="#">Islamic State</a> the opportunity to leave Syria and travel onwards to the UK, EU, Canada and the US, a Guardian investigation has found.</p> <p>One such network, run by an Uzbek with extremist links living in Turkey, is now selling high-quality fake passports for up to \$15,000 (£11,132) purporting to be from various countries. In at least 10 cases the Guardian is aware of, people who illegally crossed the Syrian border into Turkey have used his products to depart through Istanbul airport.</p> <p>Sellers claim the EU is the most popular destination but say in at least two cases people were able to travel from Istanbul to Mexico on fake Russian passports and, from there, illegally over the border into the US. Niger and Mauritania are also popular destinations, as are Ukraine and Afghanistan.</p> <p>The Uzbek's business is doing so well he recently opened a new channel on the encrypted messaging app Telegram with the official-sounding name "Istanbul Global Consulting". The growing trade suggests that dangerous extremists could be slipping under the radar of security services around the world, escaping justice for past crimes and potentially able to continue terrorist activity in countries other than Syria.</p> <p>"I do not ask about which group someone is with. I am willing to work with anyone," the Uzbek said in a message chat with the Guardian, which posed as an interested client. "It is not my job to see who is bad and who is not. The security services should deal with it."</p> <p>Western security officials warned in 2015 that IS had managed to obtain significant equipment such as blank passport books and printers to make Syrian and Iraqi passports, which it used to disguise operatives among the more than 1 million people who fled to Europe during the peak of the refugee crisis. IS claimed several attacks around the continent shortly after, including the November 2015 attack on the Bataclan theatre in Paris and the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.</p> <p>Since then, European border agencies have invested in technology and personnel training to better identify forged passports. In 2020, Tajikistan totally overhauled its consular staff in Istanbul and document system in an attempt to stamp out the use of fake Tajik passports.</p> <p>But in response, sellers of fake passports have also upped their game, using a wider variety of nationalities for prospective clients.</p> <p>The Uzbek sent several videos of his wares, including crisp new French, Belgian, Bulgarian and Russian passports that appear to feature authentic security watermarks and holograms.</p>

When placed under a black light, two Russian passports contain UV-sensitive materials designed to stop passport forgery, and a Belgian passport placed on a scanner similar to those used in airports appears to read correctly, with the holder's details appearing on the monitor.

According to document sellers, it is impossible to fake a working biometric chip, but at many border crossings officials checking passports simply ignore those that don't work, waving the passport holder through.

"There is a particular seller in Turkey who provides IS members with very high level [ie, well forged] documents," using interlocutors who speak Russian, Arabic and other languages to cater for different clients, said a source at the US Department of Homeland Security.

"We are aware of IS members using these fake passports to cross to Europe, and European security is not successful in arresting them all."

While the document sellers' most popular service is providing documents for foreign fighters in Syria associated with IS and other armed groups to travel to Europe, the group has also identified new areas to expand.

On a Telegram chat for people in al-Hawl, a camp in north-east Syria home to about 60,000 women and children with links to IS, one of the Uzbek's online marketers, a foreign woman detained in another camp nearby, has posted: "If you need fake documents from Russia, Central Asia, Turkey, Europe, DM me."

The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban had also created a new client base of Afghan refugees in Turkey, the Uzbek said. Although his services are too expensive for most displaced Afghans, he says his clients use the fake passports to board flights to western countries, and then claim asylum once they land.

While low-ranked IS fighters usually barely have money to buy one passport, high-level members who want to completely drop off the grid usually buy several documents from different countries, and use them to move around frequently, changing passport for every new flight or transfer, said a Russian passport seller.

A Russian national who fought for IS until 2015 said: "I had only a couple of hundred dollars when I came from Syria so I bought the cheapest passport – a really poor-quality Tajik passport. It did not work and I was arrested in the airport in Istanbul.

"Then my family back home collected enough money to buy a better-quality one. So I got a real Russian passport, but with my photo on it, and was able to get to Ukraine with it. It is a really good one – I was once stopped by police in Ukraine and they took it but returned it to me a week later saying everything is good. Unfortunately this passport is expiring now so I am currently trying to get money to buy a new one."

To make sure a person disappears completely, for \$500 the Uzbek seller can even offer a Turkish death certificate that can be sent to their home country's consulate. "Unless you are Abu Bakr Baghdadi [The IS leader, killed in 2019] no one would go to the morgue to check if you really died. They would just accept that document and enter it into the system," he said.

There are several passport options, depending on the clients' ethnicity, languages they speak, where they want to go, and how much they have to spend. The cheapest documents with which to get to Europe are Russian, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan passports, which cost about \$5,000, or \$6,000 as part of a Schengen visa package. Other popular and slightly more expensive options are Ukrainian and Moldovan papers, which allow visa-free travel to the EU.

	<p>The most expensive option is an EU passport, which will set a client back \$8,000, usually requested by westerners and Arabs who speak some French and can pass for French or Belgian. Typically, an EU citizen arrives in Turkey on his or her own passport, sells it to the Uzbek and his colleagues for about €2,500, then the passport photo is changed to that of a client. The original owner of the passport then claims it has been lost and applies for a replacement at his or her consulate in Istanbul.</p> <p>The passports are printed in their countries of origin and taken to the country where the client is waiting, where they receive official border entry stamps, which helps cement the legitimacy of the document.</p> <p>“The passport itself relatively doesn’t cost anything. What does cost is the stamps,” said the Russian seller. “The majority of the money goes into bribes for stamps.”</p> <p>“In the past the quality of passports on the market was bad so there was a limited number of countries one could travel to from Syria,” he said. “Now those passports are of such good quality that if you have enough money, you could go absolutely anywhere.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 UN: Taliban killed ex-Afghan officials</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/30/un-100-ex-afghan-officials-security-forces-killed/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/30/un-100-ex-afghan-officials-security-forces-killed/</a>
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations has received “credible allegations” that more than 100 former members of the Afghan government, its security forces and those who worked with international troops have been killed since the Taliban took over the country Aug. 15, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says.</p> <p>In a report obtained Sunday by The Associated Press, Guterres said that “more than two-thirds” of the victims were alleged to result from extrajudicial killings by the Taliban or its affiliates, despite the Taliban’s announcement of “general amnesties” for those affiliated with the former government and U.S.-led coalition forces.</p> <p>The U.N. political mission in Afghanistan also received “credible allegations of extrajudicial killings of at least 50 individuals suspected of affiliation with ISIL-KP,” the Islamic State extremist group operating in Afghanistan, Guterres said in the report to U.N. Security Council.</p> <p>He added that despite Taliban assurances, the U.N. political mission has also received credible allegations “of enforced disappearances and other violations impacting the right to life and physical integrity” of former government and coalition members.</p> <p>Guterres said human rights defenders and media workers also continue “to come under attack, intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and killings.”</p> <p>Eight civil society activists were killed, including three by the Taliban and three by Islamic State extremists, and 10 were subjected to temporary arrests, beatings and threats by the Taliban, he said. Two journalists were killed - one by IS - and two were injured by unknown armed men.</p> <p>The secretary-general said the U.N. missions documented 44 cases of temporary arrests, beatings and threats of intimidation, 42 of them by the Taliban.</p> <p>The Taliban overran most of Afghanistan as U.S. and NATO forces were in the final stages of their chaotic withdrawal from the country after 20 years. They entered Kabul on Aug. 15 without any resistance from the Afghan army or the country’s president, Ashraf Ghani, who fled.</p> <p>The Taliban initially promised a general amnesty for those linked to the former government and international forces, and tolerance and inclusiveness toward women and ethnic minorities. However, the Taliban have renewed restrictions on women and appointed an all-male government, which have met with dismay by the international community.</p>

Afghanistan's aid-dependent economy was already stumbling when the Taliban seized power, and the international community froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted economic support, recalling the Taliban's reputation for brutality during its 1996-2001 rule and refusal to educate girls and allow women to work.

Guterres said: "The situation in Afghanistan remains precarious and uncertain six months after the Taliban takeover as the multiple political, socio-economic and humanitarian shocks reverberate across the country."

He said Afghanistan today faces multiple crises: a growing humanitarian emergency, a massive economic contraction, the crippling of its banking and financial systems, the worst drought in 27 years, and the Taliban's failure to form an inclusive government and restore the rights of girls to education and women to work.

"An estimated 22.8 million people are projected to be in 'crisis' and 'emergency' levels of food insecurity until March 2022," the U.N. chief said. "Almost 9 million of these will be at 'emergency' levels of food insecurity — the highest number in the world. Half of all children under five are facing acute malnutrition."

On a positive note, Guterres reported "a significant decline" in the overall number of conflict-related security incidents as well as civilian casualties since the Taliban takeover. The U.N. recorded 985 security-related incidents between Aug. 19 and Dec. 31, a 91% decrease compared to the same period in 2020, he said.

The eastern, central, southern and western regions accounted for 75% of all recorded incidents, he said, with Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunar and Kandahar ranking as the most conflict-affected provinces.

Despite the reduction in violence, Guterres said the Taliban face several challenges, including rising attacks against their members.

"Some are attributed to the National Resistance Front comprising some Afghan opposition figures, and those associated with the former government," he said. "These groups have been primarily operating in Panjshir Province and Baghlan's Andarab District but have not made significant territorial inroads" though "armed clashes are regularly documented, along with forced displacement and communication outages."

Guterres said intra-Taliban tensions along ethnic lines and competition over jobs have also resulted in violence, pointing to armed clashes on Nov. 4 between Taliban forces in Bamyan city.

In the report, the secretary-general proposed priorities for the U.N. political mission in the current environment, urged international support to prevent widespread hunger and the country's economic collapse, and urged the Taliban to guarantee women's rights and human rights.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 US allies retake control Syria prison</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/world/middleeast/isis-prison-syria.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/world/middleeast/isis-prison-syria.html</a>
GIST	<p>HASAKA, Syria — Kurdish-led forces regained full control of a prison in northeastern Syria on Sunday after a battle which spread to surrounding neighborhoods in the most intense urban combat involving American soldiers in Iraq or Syria since the self-declared ISIS caliphate fell in 2019.</p> <p>"We announce the end of the sweep campaign in al-Sinaa Prison in Ghweran neighborhood in Hasaka and the end of the last pockets in which ISIS mercenaries were holed up," the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish militia, said in a statement.</p> <p>The U.S. Special Operations Joint Task Force said the militia had cleared the prison of "active enemy fighters" and was conducting recovery operations to make sure the area was fully safe. It said detainees were transferred to a more secure site.</p>

The Syrian Democratic Forces, American partners in the fight against ISIS, did not say whether the last remaining gunmen in the prison had surrendered since Saturday or whether they had been killed. S.D.F. officials said Saturday that the gunmen were believed to be holding teenage detainees hostage.

Fighting in the past week has spilled into the residential areas of Hasaka near the prison.

New York Times journalists saw several dozen bodies, some dressed in orange prison jumpsuits, being carted away over the weekend by Kurdish militiamen near the prison, an indication of the scale of fighting in recent days.

On Sunday clearing operations continued in the Ghweran neighborhood around the prison to find ISIS sleeper cells. The day before, Kurdish-led counterterrorism forces backed by U.S. Special Operations troops went house to house in the narrow alleys of the neighborhood in the majority-Arab city.

Kurdish forces threw flash grenades into homes where they believed ISIS fighters were hiding as residents gathered in the streets.

The latest round of fighting began this month after an attack by ISIS on the prison, which housed more than 3,000 ISIS members and almost 700 minors.

On Saturday the Syrian Democratic Forces said that about 30 ISIS fighters surrendered overnight but that the remaining militants in the prison were believed to be holding teenage detainees as human shields.

“We think there are cubs of the caliphate with them,” Farhad Shami, an S.D.F. spokesman, said in reference to the children forced by ISIS to become fighters.

The Kurdish militia has released conflicting information about the siege. On Wednesday it declared it had regained control of the prison after the United States launched airstrikes and sent in armored fighting vehicles to help retake it. On Thursday, it was clear that fighting with gunmen barricaded in prison buildings was continuing.

By Saturday, there were increasing signs that the battle was much fiercer than had initially been reported.

On the edge of the Ghweran neighborhood, journalists for The New York Times saw what appeared to be at least 80 bodies being transported in a small truck from the direction of the prison and being dumped in a pile on the road. Kurdish fighters heaved them one by one into the shovel of a yellow front-end loader, which moved them into a 40-foot gravel truck to be taken away for burial.

While some bodies were in prison jumpsuits, others were dressed in civilian clothing, as is also common among those held at the site. Almost all the corpses were intact and unbloodied, many of their faces and bodies black with soot.

A distraught fighter shouted at a Times photographer not to take photos.

“We know this is not right, but there are so many of them,” he said.

Hasaka, in the breakaway Kurdish-led region of Rojava, is surrounded by hostile Syrian forces and Turkish-backed troops who occupy northwestern Syria.

The region has been struggling with existential security threats, a lack of infrastructure and near financial collapse. Foreign countries have refused to repatriate ISIS fighters and their families, leaving Rojava to become a haven for the remnants of the self-declared ISIS caliphate, including thousands of accused fighters and tens of thousands of their family members.

The local administration in Rojava has long warned that it does not have the resources or the ability to run secure prisons and detention camps.

The United States maintains about 700 troops in Rojava as part of the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State. But until the prison siege the American forces for the most part conducted relatively routine missions that avoided the Russian military presence in the same area.

The S.D.F. said on Saturday that 13 of its fighters had been killed retaking the prison and securing the area, although that figure is probably higher. It has not released figures for the number of inmates killed in the fighting.

An official with the U.S.-led coalition who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly said it would take time to determine how many ISIS fighters had been killed.

S.D.F. officials have said prison inmates who were younger than 18 have been transferred to a new location. The minors were brought to Syria as young children with their parents.

An official with the Y.P.G., the main Kurdish faction, said most of the ISIS fighters who were still barricaded in the prison surrendered on Friday night after the Kurdish-led forces stormed the building.

“They told us they were surrendering and then they came out one by one and put their guns on the ground,” said Siyamend Ali, the Y.P.G. media director. He said some laid down suicide belts.

Hasaka has been under lockdown since the prison break on Jan. 20. Shops are shuttered and makeshift shelters house families displaced by the fighting. In some areas there has been no electricity or running water for more than a week.

In the Ghweran neighborhood on Saturday, a group of men and boys stood in an alley down the street from U.S. and Kurdish armored vehicles.

“It is an unbelievably bad situation,” said a laborer who would be identified only by his first name, Mohammad, because he feared speaking about ISIS. “The neighborhood has not been cleared properly yet and ISIS is using the rooftops to jump from one house to another.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Europe embassies: potential attack Kenya</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/european-embassies-warn-of-possible-terror-attack-in-kenya-3697056">https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/european-embassies-warn-of-possible-terror-attack-in-kenya-3697056</a>
GIST	<p>Several European embassies in Nairobi have issued terror alerts and urged their nationals living in Kenya to avoid public places.</p> <p>The French Embassy on Thursday warned that the persistent threats against Western nationals in Kenya poses a real risk.</p> <p><b>Warning</b></p> <p>The embassy said that the terrorists are targeting public places frequented by foreign nationals, including restaurants, hotels, places of leisure and shopping malls especially in Nairobi.</p> <p>“People in Kenya are advised to exercise extreme vigilance and avoid frequenting these public places in the coming days, including this weekend,” the alert reads.</p> <p>On its website, the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office (FCDO) advises against non-essential travel to areas within 60km of the Kenya-Somali border, Eastern Garissa County (up to 20km North-West of the A3).</p>



Others are Mandera County (Excluding Mandera West Sub County), Lamu County (Excluding Lamu Island and Manda Island), areas of Tana River County North of the River Tana (up to 20km North West of the A3) and within 15km of the Coast from the Tana River down to the Galana (Athi-Galana-Sabaki) river.

The Dutch and German embassies have also issued similar advisories.

On Monday, Kenya's Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang'i urged Kenyans to remain alert and report any suspicious activities to the police to prevent possible terror attacks.

Dr Matiang'i attributed past foiled attacks to information provided by patriotic Kenyans.

“Save for the challenge being experienced with terrorism in the country and the region, the country is largely peaceful and safe. The challenges we have in the region relating to terror are real and I have to be very frank with Kenyans and say that we have to be very cautious,” he warned.

### **Terror attacks**

Security has been beefed up in Lamu following an attack by suspected Al-Shabaab terrorists at Lango la Simba area near Nyongoro.

Five judiciary officials were shot at and injured by gunmen as they headed to Garsen town from Kipini Mobile court at around 5.50pm Wednesday.

According to the police, the officials had spent the day attending court matters at Kipini village in Tana River County.

On Sunday, terrorists also attacked a Chinese Construction Company Parking lot and destroyed eight trucks.

The National Counter Terrorism Centre has urged Kenyans to avail any information that will help foil such attacks.

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HEADLINE	01/30 IS strikes from shadows in Syria, Iraq
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/business-syria-middle-east-racial-injustice-iraq-e0c9bdc100f6ad74fb52d63a188ac978">https://apnews.com/article/business-syria-middle-east-racial-injustice-iraq-e0c9bdc100f6ad74fb52d63a188ac978</a>
GIST	<p>BEIRUT (AP) — With a spectacular jail break in Syria and a deadly attack on an army barracks in Iraq, the Islamic State group was back in the headlines the past week, a reminder of a war that formally ended three years ago but continues to be fought mostly away from view.</p> <p>The attacks were some of the boldest since the extremist group lost its last sliver of territory in 2019 with the help of a U.S.-led international coalition, following a years-long war that left much of Iraq and Syria in ruins.</p> <p>Residents in both countries say the recent high-profile IS operations only confirmed what they've known and feared for months: Economic collapse, lack of governance and growing ethnic tensions in the impoverished region are reversing counter-IS gains, allowing the group to threaten parts of its former so-called caliphate once again.</p> <p>One Syrian man said that over the past few years, militants repeatedly carried out attacks in his town of Shuheil, a former IS stronghold in eastern Syria's Deir el-Zour province. They hit members of the Kurdish-led security force or the local administration — then vanished.</p> <p>“We would think it is over and they're not coming back. Then suddenly, everything turns upside down again,” he said.</p>

They are “everywhere,” he said, striking quickly and mostly in the dark, creating the aura of a stealth omnipresent force. He spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear for his safety.

IS lost its last patch of territory near Baghouz in eastern Syria in March 2019. Since that time, it largely went underground and waged a low-level insurgency, including roadside bombings, assassinations and hit-and-run attacks mostly targeting security forces. In eastern Syria, the militants carried out some 342 operations over the last year, many of them attacks on Kurdish-led forces, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Jan. 20 prison break in Syria’s Hassakeh region was its most sophisticated operation yet.

The militants stormed the prison aiming to break out thousands of comrades, some of whom simultaneously rioted inside. The attackers allowed some inmates to escape, took hostages, including child detainees, and battled the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces for a week. It was not clear how many militants managed to escape, and some remain holed up in the prison.

The fighting killed dozens and drew in the U.S.-led coalition, which carried out airstrikes and deployed American personnel in Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the scene. The battle also drove thousands of neighboring civilians from their homes.

It harkened back to a series of jail breaks that fueled IS’s surge more than eight years ago, when they overwhelmed territory in Iraq and Syria.

Hours after the prison attack began, IS gunmen in Iraq broke into a barracks in mountains north of Baghdad, killed a guard and shot dead 11 soldiers as they slept. It was part of a recent uptick in attacks that have stoked fears the group is also gaining momentum in Iraq.

An Iraqi intelligence source said IS does not have the same sources of financing as in the past and is incapable of holding ground. “They are working as a very decentralized organization,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss security information.

The group’s biggest operations are conducted by 7-10 militants, said Iraqi military spokesman Maj. Gen. Yehia Rasool. He said he believes it is currently impossible for IS to take over a village, let alone a city. In the summer of 2014, Iraqi forces collapsed and retreated when the militants overran vast swathes of northern Iraq.

On its online channel, Amaq, IS has been putting out videos from the prison attack and glorifying its other operations in an intensified propaganda campaign. The aim is to recruit new members and “reactivate quasi-dormant networks throughout the region,” according to an analysis by the Soufan Group security consultancy.

On both sides of the Syria-Iraq border, IS benefits from ethnic and sectarian resentments and from deteriorating economies. In Iraq, the rivalry between the Baghdad-based central government and the autonomous Kurdish region in the north of the country has opened up cracks through which IS has crept back. Sunni Arab disenchantment with Shiite politicians helps the group attract young men.

In Afghanistan, IS militants have stepped up attacks on the country’s new rulers, the Taliban, as well as religious and ethnic minorities.

In eastern Syria, the tensions are between the Kurdish-led administration and Arab population. IS feeds off Arab discontent with the Kurds’ domination of power and employment at a time when Syria’s currency is collapsing.

Kurdish authorities have carried out crackdowns against the Arab population on suspicion of IS sympathies, especially after a wave of protests against living conditions. At the same time, to reduce

tensions, Kurdish authorities released detained Arabs and encouraged members of Arab tribes to join the ranks of the SDF. But those steps have raised concerns over infiltration or charges of corruption, adding to the challenges.

The militants have cells extending from Baghouz in the east to rural Manbij in Aleppo province to the west, according to Rami Abdurrahman, the head of the Syrian Observatory.

“They are trying to reaffirm their presence,” he said.

East Syria is also fractured among several competing forces. The Kurdish-led administration runs most of the territory east of the Euphrates, supported by hundreds of U.S. troops. The Syrian government, with its Russian and Iranian allies, is west of the river. Turkey and its allied Syria fighters, who view the Kurds as existential enemies, hold a belt along the countries’ border.

Dareen Khalifa, a senior Syria analyst for the International Crisis Group, said the SDF’s dependence on an “unpredictable U.S. presence” in fighting the militants is one of its biggest challenges.

She said the SDF is viewed as a lame duck that makes local residents reluctant to cooperate with anti-IS raids or provide intelligence on IS cells, particularly after the group threatened or killed many suspected collaborators in the past.

Moreover, the Kurdish authorities’ claim to be able to govern and provide services to the region and its mixed population “has taken a blow in 2021 as the economic conditions in the area deteriorated,” Khalifa said.

Residents say the Islamic State group is not collecting taxes or actively recruiting people, indicating they are not seeking to seize and control territory like they did in 2014, when they became de-facto rulers of an area that stretched across nearly a third of both Syria and Iraq. Instead, they exploit the security vacuum and lack of governance and resort to intimidation and kidnappings.

The resident of Shuheil in Deir el-Zour said they mostly operate at night, in flash attacks on military posts or targeted killings carried out from speeding motorcycles.

“It is always hit and run,” he said.

He described the area as constantly on edge, under an invisible threat from militants who blend into the population. The fear is so great, no one talks openly about them, whether good or bad, he said.

“Everyone is afraid of assassinations,” he said. “They have prestige, they have a reputation. They will never go away.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Feds: woman led all-female IS battalion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-religion-syria-arrests-d8d18842303528e4f0ecf5f25a211acd">https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-religion-syria-arrests-d8d18842303528e4f0ecf5f25a211acd</a>
GIST	<p>FALLS CHURCH, Va. (AP) — A woman who once lived in Kansas has been arrested after federal prosecutors charged her with joining the Islamic State group and leading an all-female battalion of AK-47 wielding militants.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney in Alexandria, Virginia, announced Saturday that Allison Fluke-Ekren, 42, has been charged with providing material support to a terrorist organization.</p> <p>The criminal complaint was filed under seal back in 2019 but made public Saturday after Fluke-Ekren was brought back to the U.S. Friday to face charges. Her alleged participation in the Islamic State had not been publicly known before Saturday’s announcement.</p>

Prosecutors say Fluke-Ekren wanted to recruit operatives to attack a college campus in the U.S. and discussed a terrorist attack on a shopping mall. She told one witness that “she considered any attack that did not kill a large number of individuals to be a waste of resources,” according to an FBI affidavit.

That affidavit from FBI Special Agent David Robins also alleges that Fluke-Ekren became leader of an Islamic State unit called “Khatiba Nusaybah” in the Syrian city of Raqqa in late 2016. The all-female unit was trained in the use of AK-47 rifles, grenades and suicide belts.

In all, the affidavit cites observations from six different witnesses, including some who have been charged with terrorism offenses and some who were held at prison camps for former Islamic state members.

A detention memo filed Friday by First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh states that Fluke-Ekren even trained children how to use assault rifles, and that at least one witness saw one of Fluke-Ekren’s children, approximately 5 or 6 years old, holding a machine gun in the family’s home in Syria.

“Fluke-Ekren has been a fervent believer in the radical terrorist ideology of ISIS for many years, having traveled to Syria to commit or support violent jihad. Fluke-Ekren translated her extremist beliefs into action by serving as the appointed leader and organizer of an ISIS military battalion, directly training women and children in the use of AK-47 assault rifles, grenades, and suicide belts to support the Islamic State’s murderous aims,” Parekh wrote.

According to court papers, Fluke-Ekren moved to Egypt in 2008 and traveled frequently between Egypt and the U.S. over the next three years. She has not been in the U.S. since 2011.

Prosecutors believe she moved to Syria around 2012. In early 2016, her husband was killed in the Syrian city of Tell Abyad while trying to carry out a terrorist attack, prosecutors said. Later that year, prosecutors say she married a Bangladeshi ISIS member who specialized in drones, but he died in late 2016 or early 2017.

Four months after that man’s death, she again remarried a prominent Islamic state leader who was responsible for the Islamic State group’s defense of Raqqa.

She told one witness in 2018 that she instructed a person in Syria to tell Fluke-Ekren’s Family she was dead so the U.S. government would not try to find her, according to Parekh’s memo.

Photos from a family blog called [4KansasKids](#) show her and her children in the years they traveled between Kansas and Egypt, posing at the base of the pyramids in Egypt and playing in the snow in the U.S.

A [2004 article about homeschooling in the Lawrence Journal-World](#) featured Fluke-Ekren and her children. She told the paper she pulled her kids from public school because she was dissatisfied with how her children were performing in public and private schools. Homeschooling allowed her to teach Arabic to her kids.

Court papers do not indicate how she was captured, or how long she was in custody before being turned over to the FBI Friday.

She is scheduled to make an initial appearance at U.S. District Court in Alexandria on Monday, at which time she would likely be appointed an attorney.

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HEADLINE	01/29 CIA lied to justify torturing Gitmo prisoner?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/29/the-cia-lied-to-justify-torturing-one-prisoner-after-911-20-years-later-his-story-is-still-shrouded-in-secrecy">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/29/the-cia-lied-to-justify-torturing-one-prisoner-after-911-20-years-later-his-story-is-still-shrouded-in-secrecy</a>

On the morning of 6 October the nine justices of the US supreme court filed into their wood-paneled courtroom in Washington to hear arguments in a dispute between the US government and Abu Zubaydah, a Guantánamo prisoner who has been held incommunicado and without charge for the past 20 years.

A government lawyer addressed the panel, arguing on grounds of [“state secrets”](#) that Zubaydah should be blocked from calling two CIA contractors to testify about the brutal interrogations they put him through at a hidden black site in Poland. Within minutes of his opening remarks, the lawyer was [interrupted](#) by Amy Coney Barrett, one of the rightwing justices appointed to the court by Donald Trump.

Barrett wanted to know what the government would do were the contractors to give evidence before a domestic US court about how they had “waterboarded” Zubaydah at least 83 times, beat him against a wall, hung him by his hands from cell bars and entombed him naked in a coffin-sized box for [266 hours](#). “You know,” she said, “the evidence of how he was treated and his torture.”

“Torture.”

Barrett said the word almost nonchalantly, but its significance ricocheted around the courtroom and far beyond. By using the word she had effectively acknowledged that what was done by the CIA to Zubaydah, and to at least [39 other “war on terror” detainees](#) in the wake of 9/11, was a [crime under US law](#).

After Barrett uttered the word the floodgates were opened. “Torture” echoed around the nation’s highest court 20 times that day, pronounced by Barrett six times and once by another of Trump’s conservative nominees, Neil Gorsuch, with liberal justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan also piling in.

The flurry of plain speaking by justices on both ideological wings of the court amazed observers of America’s long history of duplicity and evasion on this subject. “The way the supreme court justices used the word ‘torture’ was remarkable,” Andrea Prasow, a lawyer and advocate working to hold the US accountable for its counterterrorism abuses, told the Guardian. “You could feel the possibility that the ground is shifting.”

Prasow was astonished a second time three weeks later when Majid Khan, a former al-Qaida courier also held in Guantánamo, became the first person to [speak openly](#) in court about the torture he suffered at a CIA black site.

Khan’s description of being waterboarded, held in the nude and chained to the ceiling to the point that he began to hallucinate was so overpowering that seven of the eight members of his military jury [wrote a letter](#) pleading for clemency for him, saying his treatment was a “stain on the moral fiber of America”.

The ground does appear to be shifting, and as it does attention is once again falling on one of the great unfinished businesses of the 21st century: the US torture program. In the [panicky](#) aftermath of 9/11, when the world seemed to be imploding, the CIA took the view that the ends – the search for actionable intelligence to thwart further terrorist attacks – justified any means.

With the enthusiastic blessing of the justice department and George W Bush’s White House, the [CIA](#) abandoned American values and violated international and US laws by adopting callous cruelties that they consciously copied from the enemy.

They took one prisoner, Abu Zubaydah, and made him their experimental guinea pig. On Zubaydah’s back they built an entire edifice of torture – “enhanced interrogation techniques” as the bloodless euphemism went – that in turn was founded upon a mountain of lies. When the worst of the torture was completed, to spare themselves from possible prosecution the CIA [insisted](#) that Zubaydah remain “in isolation and incommunicado for the remainder of his life”.

“The torture program was designed for only one person – they gave him a name and that name was Abu Zubaydah,” Mark Denbeaux, Zubaydah’s lead habeas lawyer, told the Guardian. “After they tortured him,

they demanded that he be held incommunicado forever so that his story could never be told. Since that moment the only people he has ever spoken to are his torturers, his jailers, and his lawyers, including me.”

Twenty years after Zubaydah was waterboarded, [slammed repeatedly against a wall](#), sleep-deprived, face slapped, chained in painful stress positions, hosed with freezing water, stripped naked, and blasted with deafening noise, his story still has not fully been told. In 2014 the Senate intelligence committee released a heavily redacted, [500-page executive summary](#) of its seven-year investigation into the torture program, generating headlines around the world and leading Barack Obama to conclude that “these harsh methods were not only inconsistent with our values, they did not serve our national security”.

Yet at the insistence of the CIA the full report from which the summary was drawn remains under lock and key to this day. All three volumes of it. All more than 6,700 pages. All 38,000 footnotes. All the detail distilled from 6.2m pages of classified CIA documents.

The persistent refusal to release the full Senate torture report has left a black hole at the centre of one of the most shameful episodes in US history. Now, with the T-word being heard even in the hallowed halls of the US supreme court, renewed calls are being made for the report to be published so that this sorry chapter can finally be closed.

Several of the individuals most closely involved in the battle for the truth over Abu Zubaydah’s treatment have told the Guardian that 20 years is long enough. It is time for the American people to be told the full unadulterated facts about what was done in their name.

“More than seven years after the completion of the torture investigation, it remains critically important that the public see the full report,” said Ron Wyden, the Democratic senator from Oregon who was an important [advocate](#) for the Senate investigation and who played a critical role in ensuring that at least some of its findings have emerged into daylight.

Wyden called for a full accounting of the CIA’s handling of detainees. He said a wealth of information still shrouded in secrecy would confirm that the torture program was ineffective – it simply didn’t work.

“The withholding of the full report, and the redactions in the public executive summary, have hidden from the public the story of how the program was developed and operated. Understanding how all of this happened is important because it must never happen again.”

Daniel Jones, [the chief author of the US Senate report](#), said that now was the moment for its release. “The country is ready. It’s what you do in a transparent democracy: when you mess up you admit it and you move on as a better country. We’ve reached that point now.”

Abu Zubaydah, 50, (actual name Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn) is a Saudi-born Palestinian who was one of the CIA’s “high-value” targets in the wake of 9/11. He was captured in Faisalabad, Pakistan, on 28 March 2002 in a raid in which he was shot several times including in the thigh and groin. He later [lost his left eye](#) while in US custody in unexplained circumstances.

John Kiriakou, a former CIA counter-terrorism officer, was a leading member of the team that seized Zubaydah, sitting guard at the prisoner’s bedside after the raid. Though Kiriakou did not participate in the prisoner’s subsequent interrogations at secret black sites in Thailand, Poland, [Lithuania](#) and other countries, he continued to keep tabs on his captive.

In December 2007, having by then left the CIA, Kiriakou gave an [interview](#) to NBC News in which he became the first former government official publicly to state that Zubaydah had been waterboarded – the process where a cloth is placed over a detainee’s face and water poured over it as a form of controlled drowning. Kiriakou declared that he had come to view the procedure as torture.

Kiriakou’s comments marked the first chink in the wall of official silence surrounding the CIA’s abuses. The move displeased his former employers and he was made the subject of a leak inquiry that ended in a



sentence of 23 months in a federal penitentiary – he is convinced as an act of revenge – ostensibly for having [revealed](#) the identity of a covert CIA agent to a journalist.

Unbeknownst to him at the time, Kiriakou in fact gave erroneous information in his NBC News interview. He said Zubaydah had been waterboarded only once and that the detainee had instantly cracked, divulging good actionable intelligence in less than a minute.

In fact, the prisoner was waterboarded not once but at least 83 times over more than a month. After the torture began in earnest at “detention site green” in Thailand in August 2002, the CIA gleaned no valuable information from Zubaydah whatsoever.

Kiriakou told the Guardian that his remarks to NBC had been based on what he picked up at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. “This was all a lie and we didn’t know it was a lie until it was declassified in 2009. So on top of being illegal, unethical and immoral, it was also false.”

To Kiriakou, the supreme court’s ease with the word “torture” 14 years after he used it for the first time on network television is “vindication that it was wrong”. He said he was dismayed that the CIA continues to cover up its “barbaric crimes” by resisting release of the full Senate report, likening the study to the defense department’s internal account of the Vietnam war that changed the course of history when it was leaked in 1971.

“We knew a lot about what was happening in Vietnam but we didn’t have official government confirmation until Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers. It’s the same here. We have had some testimony from torture victims but we don’t have official confirmation of what the CIA did from the CIA itself, and that’s what release of this report would do.”

The lies to which Kiriakou fell foul were intrinsic to the torture program from its inception. Zubaydah was used as the prototype for a new type of “enhanced interrogation” that crossed the line into torture.

In April 2002 a pair of psychologists, [James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen](#), were brought on board by the CIA on contract to create the program. They based the plan partly on experiments on dogs that found if you hurt and humiliated the animals sufficiently, eventually they would stop resisting – “[learned helplessness](#)” as it was known in the trade. (At least in this regard the torture program proved successful – Zubaydah did reach such a place of helplessness. It got to the point that as soon as an interrogator snapped his fingers twice, the detainee would lie flat on the waterboard and wait supinely for the controlled drowning to begin.)

The psychologists, whom the CIA [paid more than \\$80m](#) for their efforts, consciously modeled their interrogation methods on the so-called SERE training of American soldiers on how to resist torture were they to fall into enemy hands. The contractors openly adopted the enemy torture techniques, without irony, despite the fact that the methods were designed to extract propaganda statements from US prisoners of war and not accurate intelligence.

Senior CIA officials knew that they faced an uphill battle in persuading the Department of Justice that what they planned to do was legal – after all torture was categorically prohibited under the 1949 Geneva Conventions that the US had ratified. So they presented the DoJ with a “[psychological assessment](#)” of Zubaydah justifying why he needed to be made to talk using aggressive interrogation methods, warning that “countless more Americans may die unless we can persuade Zubaydah to tell us what he knows”.

It was all a smorgasbord of lies. “The reasons they gave for why he had to be tortured were false and known to be false,” Denbeaux said.

“The justice department was duped into approving the torture of a man who was never a member of al-Qaida. They said he was number two, three or four of al-Qaida – not true. They said he was part of 9/11 – laughable and not true. They said he was part of all al-Qaida operations around the world – totally untrue.”



Denbeaux added that one of the most urgent arguments in favour of releasing the full Senate report was that it would expose the lies at the core of the program. "It would show in detail how the falsity was made up, and who in the CIA put these false facts together."

Zubaydah's psychological profile was not the only aspect of the untruths that formed the building blocks of the torture program. The CIA was also misleading about the efficacy of "enhanced interrogation techniques".

Ali Soufan has personal knowledge of how distorted the official CIA account was. A former FBI special agent, he was one of the first US officials to interrogate Zubaydah at a black site.

He did so using conventional interrogation methods that would be familiar to students of Law & Order. He learned everything he could about his subject, spoke in the prisoner's own language (Arabic), built up a rapport with Zubaydah, and played mind games on him such as giving him the impression that the FBI knew much more about his activities than in fact they did.

All without recourse to force, violence or humiliation. "We did not need torture to get information," Soufan told the Guardian.

Soufan and his FBI partner succeeded in securing Zubaydah's cooperation and extracting significant intelligence from the prisoner, including the central role played by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as the architect of 9/11. Even so, they were abruptly pulled off the job and replaced by the CIA contractors armed with a very different approach.

Soufan watched aghast as CIA operatives, under the instruction of Mitchell and Jessen, began to torture the prisoner. "At the beginning it was mostly loud music," Soufan said. "He was held naked in the cell. That shocked me at the time. It was stupid, why are we doing it, the guy is already giving information. And then it evolved, one step after another."

Starting at 11.50am on 4 August 2002, Zubaydah was tortured through a variety of methods, almost 24 hours a day, for 19 days without break. After a waterboarding session he was noted to have "involuntary leg, chest and arm spasms" and to be unable to communicate. On one occasion he became "completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth".

Given Zubaydah's incommunicado status, he has never been allowed to recount his experiences directly to the American people. But over the years his lawyers have managed to put together notes in which the Guantánamo detainee describes his abuse.

Excerpts of those notes, together with some of Zubaydah's drawings that he sketched from memory in Guantánamo that illustrate his treatment at the CIA black sites, are being [published by the Guardian](#). They amount to a harrowing account in Zubaydah's own words and images of the relentless, round-the-clock, prolonged and illegal abuse he suffered.

Soufan, who is now CEO of the Soufan Group, said the release of the full Senate report is essential to counter the CIA narrative, which he fears that too many Americans still believe – that torture works. "Most of the American public believe the Hollywood version: you beat someone up, they give you the information you want, you save lives."

Soufan added: "Release the full Senate report and you will see that the CIA shaped a false narrative. The torture did not work, it did not produce information that saved lives, it did hinder our counterterrorism operations and destroy our image and reputation around the world."

Soufan's own experiences give some hope that the full Senate report might one day be made public. When his book on the war of terror, *The Black Banners*, was published in 2011 it was [so heavily redacted](#) by the CIA that he even had to black out any reference to himself including the words "I", "me", "our" and "we".

It took him a legal battle lasting nine years, but in 2020 he was finally able to bring out a declassified edition. Soufan hopes that the softening attitude of CIA chiefs towards his book bodes well for an eventual release of the Senate report.

“The CIA is now a very different organization from what it was in 2002. The people who were directly involved in the torture program, they are all out and there is a new leadership who understand the impact of all this.”

Kiriakou is more pessimistic about a CIA change of heart: “For the next 100 years the CIA will do anything it can to stop that report being made public.”

The Guardian asked the CIA whether it had plans to revisit the question of whether the report could be published, and invited the agency to comment. It did not immediately respond.

For all the uncertainty about the CIA’s intentions, calls for release of the full Senate report are growing. Prasow said that the US will find it all but impossible to close Guantánamo without grappling with the torture issue first.

“The public has been sold a false story that torture victims were somehow less deserving of human rights protections. For far too long it’s been too easy to see torture victims as ‘other’. It’s time to bring them out into the light.”

Denbeaux, Zubaydah’s lawyer, said that releasing the report would help fill in some of the void that was left in 2005 when the CIA destroyed videotapes of the torture of Zubaydah. “In the absence of the destroyed footage, the full Senate report would bring home to the American people the cumulative horror of how the torture worked, day after day, hour after hour, continuously, endlessly. This was a hideous awful thing, and they’d like us to forget about it?”

Jones, the report’s chief author, said that were it to emerge in its totality it would “shut the book and remove any lingering doubts” – about the torture, about its ineffectiveness, and about the lies that were told. “There are so many examples in it of the CIA misleading Congress, the White House, the public.”

Among the items still waiting to be revealed is a photograph that has never been made public that Jones and his team discovered of a waterboard that was stored at the notorious “Salt Pit”, a black site outside Bagram airbase in Afghanistan. The device appeared extremely well used, and in the photo it is seen surrounded by buckets of water and bottles of a peculiar pink solution.

The photograph puzzled Jones and his team of investigators because there were no official records to indicate that waterboarding had ever been practiced at the Salt Pit. When the Senate team asked the CIA to explain the photograph, the agency said it had no answer.

In the last analysis, Jones said that it all points to a massive failure of accountability – a failure that until the full report is made public will continue to gnaw away at the nation’s standing and self-respect. “We’ve failed at every level of accountability – criminal, civil and societal,” he said. “If this is never to happen again, there has to be a reckoning.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 Militia ultimatum to ISIS: surrender or die
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/middleeast/isis-syria-prison-sinaa.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/middleeast/isis-syria-prison-sinaa.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	HASAKA, Syria — A U.S.-backed militia in Syria delivered a surrender-or-die ultimatum on Friday to dozens of Islamic State fighters holding out in a prison a week after they attacked it, saying they would face an all-out military assault if they did not give themselves up.

The Islamic State assaulted the Sinaa prison in the city of Hasaka in an attempt to free thousands of former ISIS fighters, breaching the walls with bombs and holding some of the almost 700 child detainees there as human shields, according to the militia, the Syrian Democratic Forces, or the S.D.F.

The fight for the prison drew in American forces to back the Kurdish-led S.D.F., in the biggest battle between ISIS and the United States since the fall nearly three years ago of the Islamic State's self-declared caliphate, a vast stretch of territory in Syria and Iraq.

The ISIS attack on the prison, which was holding at least 3,000 men from a dozen countries who were accused of having fought for the militant group, has highlighted the dangers of leaving the responsibility for guarding the remnants of the group to a militia force in an impoverished, breakaway region of Syria.

When the caliphate fell, tens of thousands of ISIS fighters, along with their families, came under S.D.F. control. Thousands of these captured fighters were foreigners whose home countries refused to repatriate them. Instead, they have been languishing in makeshift prisons and detention camps run by a militia force facing its own security threats.

"The security situation needs organized prisons and proper support to the security forces, and self-administration in the areas in which ISIS prisons exist," said Adnan Mansour, of the S.D.F. Coordination and Military Operations Center. "Otherwise it will be a new war and we will need military operations."

Friday's ultimatum underscored that ISIS forces still controlled at least part of the prison complex, despite a claim earlier in the week that the siege had been ended.

On Wednesday, the S.D.F. declared that it had [regained full control of the entire prison complex](#) after six days of fighting. But on Thursday, battles raged on to expel the fighters still holed up in the prison in the middle of the city.

On Friday, Kurdish special forces were conducting house-to-house searches to hunt down members of ISIS sleeper cells and escaped prisoners.

Siyamend Ali, media director of the People's Protection Units, the main Syrian-Kurdish paramilitary group within the S.D.F., offered an explanation on Friday for the confusion. He said the militia discovered on Thursday that about 60 ISIS fighters had been hiding undetected in a basement in one of the buildings in the prison complex, which was built around a former technical institute.

"We gave them a time limit: If they don't surrender, then we will use military methods," said Mr. Ali, speaking near the site of the prison as U.S. armored fighting vehicles from a nearby base sped past, American flags waving. He said the ISIS fighters faced being killed if they did not surrender.

Mr. Ali would not say what the deadline was for the surrender ultimatum. He did say that the S.D.F. was sending messages to the fighters by loudspeaker, but that the fighters had not responded.

He said the remaining militants were believed to have been among those who attacked the prison rather than detainees, and that they were armed with assault rifles and machine guns, some of them seized from prison guards killed in the assault. He said some had suicide belts.

S.D.F. officials said the possibility that the ISIS fighters were holding hostages necessitated proceeding cautiously in their efforts to fully retake the prison complex.

"This is an operation of strategic patience," said Mr. Mansour, from the S.D.F. Coordination and Military Operations Center.

He said ISIS had tried to lure the Kurdish-led forces into inadvertently killing hostages held by the Islamic State fighters.

In Washington, a senior U.S. official said the goal of ISIS in the prison attack seemed to have been to break out specific inmates, including those with bomb-making skills.

Mr. Mansour said the attack also served an important propaganda purpose for ISIS in the form of a rallying call to its supporters that the caliphate could return and a broader conflict could reignite.

Leaders of Rojava, the autonomous Kurdish-led region in northeastern Syria where the prison is, have long called on countries to take back thousands of their citizens detained when ISIS was territorially defeated in 2019. The region is threatened by the Syrian regime and by Turkey; as a breakaway region, it has no official relations with most other countries.

On Friday, near the prison complex, fighters from the People's Protection Units brought out a man suspected of being an ISIS militant who had been hiding in a house. They accused him of being a Saudi foreign fighter and handed him over to the S.D.F. to detain him.

New York Times correspondents saw the suspected militant carrying a black-and-silver briefcase with multiple envelopes, one of them containing Saudi currency. The S.D.F. said other envelopes contained U.S. dollars and a Saudi passport.

The man said he had the money because he had been in Saudi Arabia for a pilgrimage.

As journalists watched, S.D.F. fighters shoved him into a vehicle and drove away. One of the fighters held him in a headlock.

An S.D.F. spokesman said Wednesday that at least 30 militia fighters and more than 100 militants had been killed in the fighting for the prison. The final tally is expected to be considerably higher.

The S.D.F. said on Thursday that it had regained custody of the boys being held in the prison after taking control of most of the prison, and had transferred them to a separate facility. Human rights activists and some aid organizations have said the boys were as young as 10. S.D.F. officials said they ranged in age from 14 to 17.

It was unclear if all the boys were accounted for, and if there had been any casualties among them.

All were brought as children by their parents to join the Islamic State, with some forced by ISIS to become child fighters.

Over the course of the weeklong fight for the prison, the U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIS has conducted airstrikes, and a small number of U.S. ground troops were sent to help the S.D.F. retake the prison.

The United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, said the fighting had forced 45,000 people in this city of one million to flee their homes, most of them women and children. Some have gone to stay with relatives, while others ended up in shelters in the city.

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HEADLINE	01/29 ISIS proves its thriving, still posing threat
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq.html</a>
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — One week after Islamic State fighters attacked a prison in northeastern Syria, where they have held out despite a heavy assault by a Kurdish-led militia backed by the United States, the terrorist organization published its version of what had gone down.</p> <p>In its official magazine, it mocked how many times in its history its foes had declared the Islamic State to be defeated. Its surprise attack on the prison, it crowed, had made its enemies “shout in frustration: ‘They have returned again!’”</p> <p>That description was not entirely wrong.</p>

The battle for the prison, in the city of Hasaka, killed hundreds of people, [drew in U.S. troops](#) and offered a stark reminder that three years after [the collapse of the Islamic State's so-called caliphate](#), the group's ability to sow chaotic violence persists, experts said. On Saturday, about 60 ISIS fighters [still controlled part of the prison](#).

In Iraq, ISIS recently killed 10 soldiers and an officer at an army post and beheaded a police officer on camera. In Syria, it has assassinated scores of local leaders, and it extorts businesses to finance its operations. In Afghanistan, the withdrawal of American forces in August has left it to battle the Taliban, with often [disastrous consequences for the civilians caught in the middle](#).

The Islamic State, which once controlled territory the size of Britain that spanned the Syria-Iraq border, is not as powerful as it once was, but experts say it could be biding its time until conditions in the unstable countries where it thrives provide it with new chances to expand.

"There is no U.S. endgame in either Syria or Iraq, and the prison is just one example of this failure to work toward a long-term solution," said Craig Whiteside, an associate professor at the U.S. Naval War College who studies the group. "It really is just a matter of time for ISIS before another opportunity presents itself. All they have to do is to hang on until then."

The Islamic State, whose history goes back to the insurgency following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, reached the summit of its powers around 2015, when it ruled multiple cities in Syria and Iraq, attracted droves of foreign fighters from as far away as China and Australia, and ran a sophisticated propaganda machine that inspired or directed foreign attacks from Berlin to San Bernardino, Calif.

A military coalition led by the United States partnered with local forces in Syria and Iraq to roll it back, until a Kurdish-led militia, the Syrian Democratic Forces, [pushed it from its last patch of territory in early 2019](#).

Since then, the organization has morphed from a [top-down, military-style bureaucracy](#) to a more diffuse and decentralized insurgency, according to terrorism experts and regional security officials.

But the importance of the prison as a target suggested that last week's attack would have been green lit "by the highest levels," Mr. Whiteside said. The group's ability to mobilize dozens of fighters and break into a prison that American and S.D.F. officials long suspected was a target was an achievement and a propaganda coup no matter how the siege turns out.

A senior American official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the probable goal of the operation was to free some of the group's senior or midlevel leaders and fighters with specific skills, like bomb-making. The official estimated that perhaps 200 prisoners had escaped.

S.D.F. officials have not confirmed that number and said they were still assessing the effect.

The Islamic State has struggled to rebuild. The killing of its leader, [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#), in October 2019 deprived it of a unifying figure, and its new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, is largely unknown. Tighter border controls have blocked foreign fighters from getting to Iraq and Syria, and persistent raids by U.S.-backed forces in both countries have largely pushed it out of the big cities and into the peripheries.

In Iraq, the group ramped up attacks in 2019 and 2020, but they have declined since then in both quantity and quality, according to an [in-depth analysis of attack data](#) by Michael Knights and Alex Almeida published this month.

"For now, at the outset of 2022, the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq is at a very low ebb, with recorded attack numbers that rival the lowest ever recorded," they wrote.

They cite a range of factors: a greater security presence in rural areas, thermal cameras that can detect militants moving at night, frequent security sweeps and a campaign of “decapitation strikes” against the group’s leaders.

The authors do not draw conclusions about the group’s future, but suggest that ISIS may be saving its resources until circumstances give it an opportunity to break out.

The group has passed through weak stretches before, the authors note, and has still managed to rebound. Before it attacked the prison in Hasaka last week, ISIS in Syria was primarily operating in the country’s sparsely populated east, where its fighters sought refuge in the desert to plot attacks on Syrian government and Kurdish-led forces, according to analysts and local residents.

From 2018 to 2021, it stepped up a campaign of assassinations of local leaders and tribal figures, killing more than 200, according to [a study by DeirEzzor24](#), an activist network.

More recently, it has extorted local businesses for cash, spread fliers against the U.S.-backed S.D.F. and carried out a string of attacks on isolated checkpoints that has caused some to be abandoned, said Dareen Khalifa, senior Syria analyst with the International Crisis Group.

“The reality is that it got worse in 2021, not because there were so many attacks on checkpoints, but there were enough attacks to make the internal security forces scared to man checkpoints,” she said.

Other factors have contributed to ISIS’s persistence, she said, citing the S.D.F.’s struggle to forge trusted relations with local residents in overwhelmingly Arab areas, porous borders, crushing poverty that makes it easier for the jihadists to smuggle weapons and people, and the area’s overall instability.

Some sudden disruption, like financial problems for the S.D.F. and its affiliated administration, a new military incursion by Turkey [similar to the one in 2019](#) or a precipitous withdrawal of the 700 U.S. troops based in the area to support the S.D.F., could give the jihadists an opening, Ms. Khalifa said.

“ISIS is a local insurgency, and might not be an imminent transnational risk,” she said. “But if there is a vacuum of some sort in Syria, this is where these movements really thrive. That is when it becomes more of an external threat.”

What ISIS has not been able to do since 2019 is control significant territory. The splashy operation in Hasaka, analysts said, does not change that.

“Contrary to popular opinion, that doesn’t move the needle much, and it doesn’t get them closer to re-establishing control over populations,” Mr. Whiteside said. That control, he said, is “their reason for being, why they call themselves ‘the State.’”

The prison attack was still one of ISIS’s most ambitious since 2018, and it should not have come as a great surprise.

The prison was in fact a converted training institute beefed up with bars and other fortifications, not an ideal lockup for thousands of former fighters from a group that has historically relied on prison breaks to replenish its ranks.

And it was a known target.

Last month, the S.D.F. media office released [a video of a man identified as a captured ISIS commander](#), saying he had been responsible for planning a foiled attack involving two car bombs and a bunch of armed commandos.

Their goal? To storm the prison in Hasaka that ISIS seized last week.



## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/28 Dolphins guard US nukes
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220128-dolphins-guard-u-s-nukes">https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220128-dolphins-guard-u-s-nukes</a>
GIST	<p>Despite all the technological advancements warfare has seen in the last century, the U.S. Navy proves that, sometimes, the natural option does the job just right.</p> <p>As <i>Military.com</i> recently <a href="#">reported</a>, the Navy has trained dolphins and sea lions since 1967 for various military applications like mine clearing, force protection, and recovery missions under the <a href="#">U.S. Navy Marine Mammal Program</a>. Dolphins deployed as early as the Vietnam War and as recently as the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.</p> <p>Based at Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific, animals in the program train in San Diego Bay, and that training has allowed the Navy to contribute more than 1,200 open scientific publications discussing the animals' health, physiology, sensory systems, and behavior to the body of academic literature on them.</p> <p><a href="#">Pandora Report</a> notes that they continue to serve an important mission at home, including defending the waters around Bangor, Washington, which is the largest single nuclear weapons site in the world. This stockpile contains about 25 percent of the U.S. 9,962 nuclear warheads and has done so since 2010.</p> <p>Information about the program was only declassified in the 1990s, and the United States remains the only known country to have such a program currently. The Soviets trained dolphins for similar harbor protection missions, though their program status remained in limbo after the USSR collapsed. Russia possibly sold the animals to <a href="#">Iran in 2000</a>, according to <i>Military.com</i>. The article concludes with, "Russia is said to have been looking to update its training program, and may even have used them in Syria."</p> <p>The U.S. military, particularly the Air Force, has publicly struggled with disciplinary and oversight issues at sites tasked with guarding nuclear weapons, including the <a href="#">2007 incident</a> in which six AGM-129 ACM cruise missiles were flown over the United States on a B-52H heavy bomber. <a href="#">USAF Maj. Gen. Michael Carey</a>, then head of the 20th Air Force- the United States' main nuclear ICBM strike force, was relieved of his duties after a drunken escapade in a Moscow Mexican restaurant while leading a high-level delegation's trip to meet their Russian nuclear counterparts.</p> <p>"The Navy's marine mammals, however, remain stalwart guardians of the U.S. most sensitive weapons and vigilant companions as they continue to sniff out mines and other munitions, including a rare <a href="#">19th century Howell torpedo</a> discovered off the coast of Coronado, CA in 2013," <i>Pandora Report</i> writes.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Off-duty Vancouver officer killed at home
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/clark-county-sheriffs-deputy-shoots-and-kills-person-during-robbery-pursuit/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/clark-county-sheriffs-deputy-shoots-and-kills-person-during-robbery-pursuit/</a>
GIST	<p>A Clark County Sheriff's deputy fatally shot a person amid an armed robbery investigation Saturday, the <a href="#">sheriff's office reported</a>, and the <a href="#">Vancouver Police Department separately said</a> one of its off-duty police officers was killed at his home on the same day.</p> <p>Neither agency has said whether the two incidents are related.</p> <p>The officer killed was identified by the Vancouver Police Department as Donald Sahota, 52, who had been with the police department since April 2014, according to a news release. Before that, Sahota worked for the Gresham, Oregon, and Port of Portland police departments.</p>



The Lower Columbia Major Crimes Team is independently investigating the shooting, a normal practice when law enforcement officers fatally fire a weapon while on duty. The Vancouver Police Department said Sahota's death is being investigated by the same team.

"My heart goes out to Officer Sahota's family and friends and those of us in his VPD family as well," Vancouver police Chief James McElvain said in a news release. "His death is a tragic loss, and he will be deeply missed by many."

Sahota is survived by his wife and two children, according to the department. In a statement, Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle said she was heartbroken by news of his death. All flags at City of Vancouver facilities will be lowered to half-staff.

"I am grateful for his commitment to and service to his department, his fellow officers, and the community," she said Sunday in a statement.

The sheriff's office did not specify whether the individual shot and killed by a deputy was suspected of a crime. Deputies investigated a robbery at a convenience store in the Orchards neighborhood, outside Vancouver. The robbery suspect, who deputies thought to have a handgun, drove away in a stolen vehicle, the sheriff's office wrote in a news release.

Deputies later found the vehicle in nearby Battle Ground, where the suspect reportedly ran off and "contacted" a homeowner in the area, the release reads. Sahota's address is listed in the Battle Ground area, according to Clark County property records.

At some point after this, a deputy shot someone. That person received medical attention but ultimately died at the scene.

The sheriff's office did not say what time of day or at what point during the confrontation at the home the shooting occurred.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office and the Vancouver Police Department could not be immediately reached for additional details.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Sacramento 'suspicious' vehicle explosions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/sacramento-police-investigating-multiple-suspicious-vehicle-explosions/story?id=82566438">https://abcnews.go.com/US/sacramento-police-investigating-multiple-suspicious-vehicle-explosions/story?id=82566438</a>
GIST	<p>The Sacramento Police Department is investigating two potentially related incidences of "suspicious explosions" in unoccupied vehicles in the California city.</p> <p>Police first responded to a report of an explosion on Sunday, Jan. 23, around 9:45 p.m. and "located an unoccupied vehicle with significant damage consistent with an explosion occurring inside the vehicle," according to a news release.</p> <p>A few days later, at 6 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 28, officers again responded to a call regarding an explosion and found a similarly damaged vehicle.</p> <p>"Based on evidence located during the investigation, officers believe a homemade explosive device was detonated inside the vehicle," the release stated. "The circumstances of both incidents are similar."</p> <p>The two explosions occurred within a half mile of each other in the Oak Park area of Sacramento.</p> <p>Police determined that no injuries occurred in either incident.</p>

	<p>Officials are asking anyone with information to call the dispatch center at (916) 808-5471 or Sacramento Valley Crime Stoppers at (916) 443-HELP (4357). Callers with information may receive up to a \$1,000 reward.</p> <p>This past summer, the Justice Department unsealed the indictment of two California men who allegedly conspired to blow up <a href="#">Democratic headquarters in Sacramento</a>. When investigators searched one of the men's houses last year, he allegedly had five live pipe bombs and between 45 to 50 firearms.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 China: US 'pays' athletes sabotage Games</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-media-says-us-pays-athletes-disrupt-beijing-games-2022-01-29/">https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-media-says-us-pays-athletes-disrupt-beijing-games-2022-01-29/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Jan 29 (Reuters) - China's foreign ministry and an official newspaper have accused the United States of planning to interfere with and "sabotage" the Beijing Winter Olympics by paying athletes from some countries to make half-hearted efforts in competition and to criticise China.</p> <p>The allegations were made a week before the Games start amid tensions between the two superpowers that has included a diplomatic boycott of the event by the United States, which has been joined by several other countries.</p> <p>Asked about the Chinese allegations, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing on Saturday reiterated a previous position that Washington was not coordinating a global campaign regarding participation at the Olympics.</p> <p>China Daily, an English-language newspaper run by the ruling Chinese Communist Party's Publicity Department, on Friday evening cited unnamed sources as saying United States has a plan to "incite athletes from various countries to express their discontent toward China, play passively in competition and even refuse to take part".</p> <p>In return, it said, Washington would provide a large amount of compensation and "mobilise global resources" to help protect the reputation of athletes of who choose to compete passively.</p> <p>Asked if the Chinese foreign ministry believes the allegation to be valid, a ministry spokesperson told Reuters on Saturday that the report has "exposed the real intention of some Americans to politicise sports and to sabotage and interfere with the Beijing Winter Olympics."</p> <p>The spokesperson said he strongly condemned the attempts by some Americans to "buy off" athletes and "cause trouble" during the Games, adding that these attempts are "doomed to fail".</p> <p>A U.S. Embassy spokesman told Reuters by email on Saturday, "We were not and are not coordinating a global campaign regarding participation at the Olympics."</p> <p>"U.S. athletes are entitled to express themselves freely in line with the spirit and charter of the Olympics, which includes advancing human rights," the spokesman said.</p> <p>The United States announced in December a diplomatic boycott of the Games over what it called China's human rights "atrocities", a move that was followed by allies Australia, Britain and Canada but that does not prevent U.S. athletes from travelling to Beijing to compete.</p> <p>China rejects allegations of human rights abuse and has repeatedly lashed out against the politicisation of the Games.</p> <p>In a message to convey greetings for the Chinese New Year festival next week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told China-based foreign diplomats that China "has the confidence and ability to remove the interference" and turn the Winter Games into an event that promotes friendship and mutual understanding.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Speed camera nightmare coming to US?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10455557/The-speed-camera-nightmare-thats-coming-America.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10455557/The-speed-camera-nightmare-thats-coming-America.html</a>
GIST	<p>US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg's plan to 'promote speed safety cameras' is raising the troubling specter of ubiquitous automated traffic enforcement in the style of the UK, where the cameras are widely despised.</p> <p>Buttigieg's 42-page road safety plan that was unveiled on Thursday and is backed by \$14 billion in funding from the new infrastructure bill contained only brief mention of the speed camera plan, but it was enough to set alarm bells ringing for worried motorists.</p> <p><a href="#">Fox News</a> host Tucker Carlson slammed the plan as a misuse of the funds in the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Bill, fuming that 'you're about to get a lot more speeding tickets from robots.'</p> <p>'When the country applauded \$1.2 trillion going to fixing the roads, bridges and buildings, a lot of us were dumb enough to think that's what might actually happen,' he said.</p> <p>Nonpartisan motorist advocate groups are also against the plan. The National Motorists Association has a top 10 list of why speed cameras are bad, arguing 'they can actually make our roads less safe.'</p> <p>Speed cameras have also drawn sharp criticism from some on the left, who are angry that the fines are often directed to fund police departments, making the issue rare grounds for bipartisan agreement.</p> <p>Currently, eight US states have laws specifically prohibiting speed cameras.</p> <p>Only 18 states plus D.C. have speed cameras in use by law, with the other states having no law on the books authorizing their use.</p> <p>Some Democrats did praise the overall plan, including Texas State Representative Celia Israel, who is also a candidate for mayor of Austin.</p> <p>Israel wrote: 'Thank you @SecretaryPete for making transportation safety a priority at the federal level. In the #txlege, I've heard testimony from families whose lives have forever been changed by these crashes. Its heartbreaking and the loss of life is irreplaceable.'</p> <p>In New Jersey, Hoboken Mayor Ravi Bhalla also praised the plan, which gave credit to his own city: 'Incredible recognition for Hoboken today by @PeteButtigieg, highlighting our Vision Zero efforts. Hoboken will continue to serve as a national model by prioritizing pedestrian safety &amp; implementing safety improvements that protect our vulnerable residents.'</p> <p>Neither, however, specifically addressed the speed cameras, which are illegal in both of their states.</p> <p>Buttigieg's strategy recommends pilot programs to study and promote greater use of speed cameras, which he says could provide more 'equitable' enforcement than police traffic stops, as the cameras will have no awareness of the race of the driver.</p> <p>Spurring the plan is a sharp increase in traffic fatalities in the past few years.</p> <p>Buttigieg said new federal data being released next week will show another increase in traffic fatalities through the third quarter of 2021.</p> <p>Those numbers are expected to point to a sizable increase in deaths compared with the same period in 2020, adding to a half-year traffic death total of 20,160 that already was the highest half-year figure since 2006.</p> <p>'It doesn't look good, and I continue to be extremely concerned about the trend,' Buttigieg told the AP in an interview.</p>

In the UK, speed cameras have been a way of life over the last 30 years and are widely despised, offering a grim warning to Americans of what the future may hold.

The first cameras were installed on the M40 motorway in West London in 1991. The cameras used rolls of film that had to be developed and processed and so there was a limit to the number of motorists they were able to catch.

Now, however, there are over 7,000 cameras all over the country - the fourth highest number in the world behind Russia, Italy and Brazil – which are operated 24/7 with images uploaded directly to a central control room.

Figures show that between 2016 and 2019, 1,053,239 motorists were caught speeding, raking in more than £100million.

According to insurance company GoCompare, Avon and Somerset, Kent and Cheshire are the counties hardest hit by speeding fines in Britain. The insurer estimates that more than £86million will be issued in fines between 2022 and 2025.

Money from such fines goes to the Government's Fund of the Exchequer, and the Chancellor Rishi Sunak decides where the money goes in his annual budget statement.

In the UK, police forces do not benefit financially from speeding fines although they do recover costs from speed awareness courses, offered to motorists as an alternative to penalty points in minor offences.

There are four types of camera in the UK, which may now be on their way Stateside.

The most common, the Gatso - short for Gatsometer, the name of the Dutch manufacturer - is a rear-facing, pole-mounted camera which faces up the road so it can take a picture of the rear of the speeding vehicle and so catch motorcyclists as well as cars, vans and trucks.

Truvelo cameras – named after the South African company which makes them - look similar to a Gatso but are forward-facing and use a special filtered flash to get a clear image of a vehicle registration plate without dazzling the driver.

HADECS 3- or Highways Agency Digital Enforcement Camera System 3 - is a rear-facing camera used on smart motorways across Britain while the SPECS camera system measures vehicle speed over a far greater distance and measures a motorist's average speed.

Specs cameras are used primarily during roadworks on motorways where a lower speed limit than usual needs to be enforced.

Critics, however, say speed cameras have been nothing more than an additional 'tax' on drivers over the last three-decades.

Claire Armstrong, co-founder of anti-speed camera pressure group Safe Speed, said: 'We have been calling for the removal of all automated speed cameras.

'They are not intelligent, they are not proper, they are not proportionate and there is no place for them in road safety policy.

'Speed cameras have been a flawed concept from the very beginning and they don't catch the drivers that the police need to and stop them – we need to have well trained police officers back on the road.

'They have done nothing for road safety, but are catching hundreds of thousands of drivers of which the majority are otherwise driving safely.'

Safe Speed point to examples like the camera on the A22 Eastbourne Road near Lewes in Sussex, on England's southern coast, which caught 8,430 speeding motorists between 2013 and 2014 and made an eye-watering £2.3 million in fines in just one year alone.

Perhaps Britain's 'busiest speed camera', however, lies 120 miles to the west in the port city of Southampton.

The speed camera, which sits on Maybray King Way, where motorists should be driving at 30mph, is estimated to have brought in more than \$6.85million in fines between 2015 and 2017.

In those two years, 51,049 drivers were caught traveling over the speed limit and fined an average of \$130 each.

However, Hampshire Police revealed last year that the camera has been recording 'incorrect readings' for vehicles with a 'high flat rear' and at least two drivers have been able to prove they were wrongly caught by the camera so far.

One was NHS IT worker Nathan Thompson, who fought against the fine after a letter said he could be prosecuted for driving at twice his actual speed.

Mr Thompson, a father of two, said: 'If I was in a hire car or a work car and from outside the area and I didn't have proof of going 25mph I'd have had to pay it, so I wonder how many other people have been in a similar situation with that camera, as it's the most profitable in the country.'

'If I didn't have the evidence that I was going 25mph, then it would have ended up with me going to court. I'd have lost my job. That technology shouldn't go wrong. It has the potential to seriously ruin lives.'

In 2020, a report by the police watchdog, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), found that some speed cameras were being used as a money-making exercise rather than a vital tool to improve road safety.

The report concluded that speed cameras had often been located in areas that were deemed 'good hunting grounds' for speeding drivers rather than because they were accident blackspots.

It found that in 2018 over 2.1m speeding tickets were handed out, a 41 per cent rise from 1.6m in 2011.

Although London already has one of the highest numbers of speed cameras in the world, local authorities have submitted plans to control over 20mph and 30mph zones, arguing a lack of traffic police makes roads dangerous and leaves residents at risk.

The plans have been put forward by London Councils, a body that represents the capital's 32 boroughs.

Setting out the proposals, it said the maximum fine of £130 for council infringements was insufficient and would need to be raised and that extra speed cameras would have to be introduced.

However, Jack Cousens of the AA: 'Residents would rather their council focus on emptying the bins on time. Drivers will draw one conclusion: this proposal is more about the money it would generate, not the balanced enforcement of criminal law.'

Yet those in favour of speed cameras argue that the reduction in accidents and the saving of lives are far more important than any amount of money.

A study conducted at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) found that from 1992 to 2016, speed cameras reduced accidents by between 17 and 39 per cent and fatalities by between 58 to 68 per cent within 500 metres of the cameras.

The report analysed collision outcomes both before and after the cameras were installed across 2,500 sites in England, Scotland and Wales, drawing on information from the Department for Transport and local councils.

Researcher Cheng Keat Tang, from LSE, said: 'The study clearly shows that speed cameras reduce both the number and severity of road accidents. Given the huge number of fatal accidents that take place on our roads every year, the introduction of more cameras could save hundreds of lives annually and make our roads safer for users.'

The LSE report suggested that another 1,000 cameras should be added to British roads to save as many as 190 lives annually and reduce up to 1,130 collisions.

Last year, 1,390 people were killed on UK roads, down from 1,516 deaths in 2020 and 1,850 deaths in 2019, due in large part to Covid lockdown measures.

But a spokesman for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents RoSPA said: 'The evidence for speed cameras shows that they are effective at reducing speeds and preventing accidents, especially in preventing more serious and fatal accidents.'

'The UK evidence shows large reductions in deaths and injuries where speed cameras have been deployed. The magnitude and consistency of the results across different countries and types of road provides a high level of confidence that the introduction of speed cameras does reduce accidents at the sites where they are located.'

'While more research would strengthen the evidence base, the studies demonstrating their effectiveness are the strongest evidence available and must be used to inform decision making.'

Traffic officer numbers in 34 of the UK's 44 police forces has dwindled by 15 per cent in five years, a recent Freedom of Information request revealed.

Figures obtained by the BBC Panorama programme earlier this month found that the total number of dedicated traffic officers has fallen by 757 from 5,014 in 2016 to 4,257 this year, as authorities instead rely on speed cameras to enforce speed limits despite some cameras not working properly.

Meanwhile the number of deaths on the road has remained stable since 2010, having gone down regularly in the years before that.

Edmund King, President of the Automobile Association (AA), told the programme: 'Cops in cars are essential. We have seen a correlation between plateauing road deaths and the decline in the number of dedicated road traffic officers.'

'If some people think they will get away with motoring offences, they will take more chances. We should reverse this decline as traffic police are needed in this national crisis with five people dying on our roads daily. This is not acceptable on any level.'

Interestingly a 2013 study by the RAC (Royal Automobile Club) Foundation highlighted how cameras in some areas had actually caused accidents rather than preventing them.

A total of 21 camera sites had shown data where collision rates had risen 'markedly' since cameras were put in place.

As a result the RAC Foundation wrote warning letters to the seven local authorities; Merseyside, which had nine cameras of concern, Cambridge and Peterborough, where four risky cameras were identified, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent which had three, Warwickshire, which had two and South Yorkshire, Sussex and Thames Valley, who all had one.



	Overall, however, the RAC Foundation report found that on average the number of fatal and serious collisions in their vicinity fell by more than a quarter (27per cent) after the installation of cameras.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 US: Los Cabos hospital preys on Americans</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/business-travel-mexico-caribbean-d74c7db7e080317f24a89cb179b8772d">https://apnews.com/article/business-travel-mexico-caribbean-d74c7db7e080317f24a89cb179b8772d</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S. government is warning Americans to avoid a hospital at a Mexican beach destination, following years of complaints that the facility preyed on Americans by overcharging, bullying them and refusing to release medical records.</p> <p>More than 100,000 U.S. tourists arrive to Los Cabos at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula each month, drawn my its beaches and dramatic desert landscape. It appears they are not only a boon to the hotels and restaurants of twin towns Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo, but also St. Luke's Hospital in Cabo San Lucas.</p> <p>Multiple complaints have been filed by U.S. citizens saying the hospital demanded tens of thousands of dollars in advance payments, threatened patients' relatives and refused to release clinical reports on what care they had actually provided. That led the U.S. consulate in Tijuana to issue the unusual "health alert" Wednesday about St. Luke's business practices.</p> <p>"U.S. citizens have reported instances of withholding care for payment, failing to provide itemized lists of charges, ordering unnecessary procedures, withholding U.S. passports, obstructing medical evacuations, and refusing to discharge patients without payment," the consulate said in the alert.</p> <p>The hospital refused to comment when contacted by phone and email Thursday.</p> <p>The consulate urged U.S. citizens to go to other hospitals listed on the consulate's web page.</p> <p>There is some evidence that St. Luke's pays or otherwise compensates ambulances and hotels to send American patients there.</p> <p>The consulate wrote, "Please be advised that hotels and resorts in the Los Cabos area may have existing contracts or informal relationships with St. Luke's."</p> <p>That was an apparent reference to reports in local media that the hospital pays ambulance drivers to channel American patients to St. Luke's.</p> <p>The practice is apparently longstanding. An English-language forum for travelers and residents of Los Cabos posted a comment six years ago that read "Be aware that St. Luke's has ambulance chasers out all the time."</p> <p>"Apparently the drivers are paid a healthy fee for picking you up off the street and bringing you to St. Luke's," according to the post by a travel agent. "My Cabo friends told me that as long as I could talk to keep screaming DO NOT TAKE ME TO St. Luke's!!!"</p> <p>Perhaps one of the most heart-wrenching accounts was written in a formal complaint filed in August by Scott Lairson, a Los Angeles man whose wife, Patricia Lairson, was rushed to St. Luke's while the couple were vacationing there in June. She was diagnosed with acute respiratory failure and pneumonia due to COVID-19.</p> <p>Patricia Lairson had serious breathing problems and was treated at St. Luke's for 12 days.</p> <p>She got good treatment but the hospital administrators were extremely aggressive, telling her husband they would transfer his wife to the community hospital if he didn't immediately pay \$50,000 and that he would be unable to visit if he didn't pay.</p>

	<p>He put \$10,000 on his credit card but had no more money. Eventually he paid \$25,000 to get her flown to Arizona, where she died. The hospital has billed his insurance company, United Healthcare, \$1 million, but never supplied the specific medical records of each treatment to justify that billing.</p> <p>Lairson wrote that Mario Trejo Becerril, the hospital director, told him “I want that deposit today, you go outside and call your family, whoever you need to call or don’t come back to this hospital.”</p> <p>“And if I ever hear about you recording conversations with your phone, you will never see your wife again!” Lairson recounted.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 UW: methane plumes Puget Sound seafloor</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/methane-gas-bubbles-puget-sound-university-of-washington/281-fc6ae422-a165-434e-8501-48d620a45343">https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/methane-gas-bubbles-puget-sound-university-of-washington/281-fc6ae422-a165-434e-8501-48d620a45343</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Methane is a serious greenhouse gas, and it’s also coming up from hundreds of plumes out of earthquake faults under Puget Sound.</p> <p>“I find it amazing, and I’ve been here at the University since 1967,” said oceanography professor Paul Johnson, who is helping to lead new research into the plumes. He’s been on the University of Washington’s (UW) faculty for over 50 years. “Nobody knew these plumes were out there.”</p> <p>The streams of bubbles were discovered after scanning sonar aboard UW’s largest research ship was left running as the ship was returning to port in Seattle in 2011, Johnson said. The “Tommy Thompson” had been out in the open ocean doing other research, but no one noticed the plumes of gas until one of his former students began analyzing the data.</p> <p>"She's looking at the Puget Sound, 'what are those bubbles that are coming out of the Kingston Arch there by the ferry doc?'" said Johnson.</p> <p>Beginning in 2019, student cruises aboard a smaller research vessel found more bubbles off Alki Beach. Bubbles were also found coming up from the South Whidbey Island Fault to the North and the Seattle Fault Zone near Alki Point.</p> <p>A team then followed up with a separate cruise financed with a \$100 thousand grant from the National Science Foundation.</p> <p>“The fact that you have these clusters of plumes, and there are about 20 off Alki point and the Seattle Fault going all the way over to Bainbridge Island,” said Johnson, “it says somehow these fault zones are controlling where this methane comes up.”</p> <p>Johnson says there are two primary areas of concern.</p> <p>Methane plumes are nothing new out in the open ocean, but they're often occurring at ocean depths where the methane is absorbed into the water column before it makes it to the surface.</p> <p>The Puget Sound, while deep, isn't that deep. Johnson estimates about half of the Puget Sound methane could be making it to the atmosphere.</p> <p>“It’s substantial on the scale of natural sources, but it’s small when compared to leaking natural gas pipes,” Johnson said.</p> <p>Johnson would like to know how this naturally occurring methane contributes to the underlying layer of greenhouse gases to better understand the overall mix of methane gas that’s influencing climate change. He also wants to research whether the gas leaking from earthquake faults with a known risk for serious</p>

	shaking says anything about the potential for an earthquake, as well as where the methane could be coming from.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 First wild case bird flu detected in 5yrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/first-wild-case-of-bird-flu-detected-in-us-in-5-years">https://www.q13fox.com/news/first-wild-case-of-bird-flu-detected-in-us-in-5-years</a>
GIST	<p><b>COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)</b> - A duck killed by a hunter in South Carolina had a contagious and dangerous bird flu that has not been detected in the wild in the U.S. in five years, officials said.</p> <p>"The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspective Service (APHIS) <a href="#">recently announced the first detections of Asian highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 viruses in wild birds in the United States since 2016</a><a href="#">external icon</a>. Wild birds can carry HPAI A(H5N1) bird flu without showing symptoms, but these viruses can cause illness and death in domestic poultry," the CDC <a href="#">wrote</a> on Thursday.</p> <p>The flu poses a low risk to people but can spread quickly through chicken houses and other poultry businesses.</p> <p>The Eurasian H5 avian influenza was first detected by Clemson University scientists and confirmed by federal testing, the school said in a news release.</p> <p>The U.S. Department of Agriculture alerted global health officials. Scattered Eurasian H5 infections have been detected in 2022 from Portugal to Bulgaria and in December, two cases were reported in eastern Canada, officials said.</p> <p>Anyone who has poultry, including backyard farms, needs to review their practices to keep birds safe from disease, said State Veterinarian Michael J. Neault, who runs Clemson University's Livestock Poultry Health program.</p> <p>Those practices include thoroughly washing hands before and after handling wild and domesticated birds and using gloves and other protective gear when handling live birds.</p> <p>Farmers should also keep their birds away from areas where geese and ducks roam, clean their cages and coops regularly and buy new birds from reputable sources and keep them away from the rest of the flock for 30 days, the university said.</p> <p>"So far we have no indication that (the flu) has jumped from wild migratory birds to poultry and we'd very much like to keep it that way," Neault said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Probing salmon mysteries in North Pacific</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/international-research-team-to-probe-salmon-mysteries-in-north-pacific/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/international-research-team-to-probe-salmon-mysteries-in-north-pacific/</a>
GIST	<p>An international team of more than 60 scientists on four vessels is headed out on rough winter seas to investigate West Coast and Alaska salmon in the North Pacific.</p> <p><a href="#">The Shimada</a>, a flagship research vessel of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will depart Port Angeles Tuesday to join the expedition with ships from Canada and Russia.</p> <p>The scientists will search for salmon as they probe mysteries that have long bedeviled scientists seeking to better understand the Pacific salmon that support cultures, communities and ecosystems across western North America.</p>

This is probably the boldest, most expansive survey of salmon and the oceanography of the open ocean in the North Pacific, said Mark Saunders, Pacific region director for the [International Year of the Salmon](#), lead organizer of the research cruise, estimated to cost about \$10 million.

The 2022 expedition will involve a full ecosystem survey with open sea trawling and sampling of marine life in the upper ocean, as well as research on physical, biological and chemical oceanography. A gill net vessel deployed in the Gulf of Alaska alongside the research ships also will be trawling to test the catch efficiency of different gear types.

Novel technologies such as environmental DNA and genetic-stock identification will be used as scientists from Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States collaborate in the cross-disciplinary effort.

The ocean has always been a black box of salmon science. Conditions make observations so difficult that the ocean, one of the most challenging stages of the salmon life cycle, is ripe for discoveries, said Laurie Weitkamp, U.S. co-chief scientist for the expedition, and research biologist at NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center Newport Research Station in Newport, Oregon.

The winter is a particularly crucial time in salmon development, when food is scarce and competition and predation potentially deadly.

Are fish getting enough to eat? Are they actually starving? Are there lots of competitors for prey? Who are they with?

"We are really trying to understand the entire ecosystem that supports salmon in winter, because our understanding is really poor right now," Weitkamp said.

Scientists from some 14 areas of inquiry will probe everything from microplastics to the food web. One crucial question scientists hope to shed light on is the distribution of different stocks, or types of salmon. Salmon follow hard-wired, ancestral feeding routes, just as caribou and other animals do on land, Weitkamp said.

Scientists wonder how salmon react to what they find along those routes. Do they peel off and go where the food is, or stick to their route, even if it means starvation?

[The 2022 International Year of the Salmon Pan-Pacific Winter High Seas Expedition](#) is supported by multiple partners, including governments, NGOs and industry.

The cruise will be underway into April, covering four zones spanning a vast area of the North Pacific. The fleet will include a research vessel and fishing vessel from Canada, a research vessel from the U.S., and a research vessel from Russia.

While the vessels are at sea, the public can follow along at the [expedition web page](#).

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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/31 Jan. 6 prosecutions extend into 2024?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/january-6-criminal-prosecutions-could-extend-into-2024-election/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/january-6-criminal-prosecutions-could-extend-into-2024-election/</a>
GIST	It's been more than a year since the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, and still none of the defendants charged in the attack have gone on trial. Although a few are expected to start in the coming months, a Justice Department official told CBS News, defense lawyers believe that some of the hundreds of trials will extend into the 2024 presidential election.

Katie Cusick has made peace with the long wait ahead. "There's a looming cloud over our head," she said.

Her father and brother are among the hundreds of January 6 defendants awaiting trial dates and the re-opening of the Washington, D.C. federal court, where U.S. Capitol attack cases are being prosecuted.

"They're frustrated by the delay and the progress," she said.

Jim and Casey Cusick, of Melbourne, Florida, are among the approximately 730 defendants in January 6 prosecutions. The two have pleaded not guilty and are free from custody, pending trials. But their defense lawyer has advised the men their cases aren't likely to close until at least 2023.

They aren't alone. None of the January 6 defendants have gone on trial yet, more than a year after the attack. Only five are expected to do so before April, a Justice Department official told CBS News.

One defense lawyer, who's handling the Cusick's case and the cases of a series of other January 6 defendants, told CBS News he expects some cases to remain open through the next presidential election in November 2024.

The Justice Department is navigating unique and profound logistical problems with its January 6 cases. The D.C. federal courthouse remains closed to jury trials through at least February 7, due to COVID risks. Most hearings are occurring virtual, through Zoom and phone connections. But trials must occur in person inside the courthouse, which is a short walk from the U.S. Capitol.

The agency is also trying to corral an unprecedented avalanche of evidence. The U.S. Capitol riot prosecution, which the agency has characterized as one of the largest criminal cases in U.S. history, is saturated with tips and possible evidence.

In a series of recent court filings, the Justice Department said there are 14,000 hours of Capitol surveillance video, 250 terabytes of data and more than 200,000 tips from the public. Along with a growing collection of social media posts, phone videos and witness interviews, federal prosecutors are trying to manage and organize a growing tower of evidence and materials.

This week, the agency notified a judge there is still "work to do" in preparing the evidence for the court, defense lawyers, defendants and trial.

"This investigation has generated an enormous amount of evidence," the Justice Department said in a court filing Thursday, as part of its request for a time extension in the case of a defendant from New Jersey.

Judges have set some trial dates, including in the high-profile cases against accused OathKeepers conspirators. Some of those trials are scheduled to begin in April, while others are expected in July and September. The later dates include defendants charged with seditious conspiracy, some of whom are in pretrial detention.

CBS News has learned approximately 40 defendants in January 6 cases are in pretrial detention in the Washington, D.C., jail, some of whom have spent nearly a year behind bars, without firm trial dates. Judges have said the cases involving defendants in pretrial custody should be prioritized for the earlier trial dates.

Katie Cusick said her family agrees her father and brother's case and trial date should wait until the higher-level jailed defendants have an opportunity to face a jury. "They have it much worse than we do," she said.

Defendants aren't the only ones eager for their day in court. U.S. Capitol Police officer Harry Dunn, who withstood physical assault and racial epithets while helping his colleagues defend the Capitol on January 6, is expected to be a witness in trials involving some of the higher-level defendants.

	<p>Dunn told CBS News his fellow officers are eager to see justice served, but they understand the reason for the growing delays. "It's worth the wait," Dunn said. "You've got to be patient."</p> <p>A CBS News review of the D.C. federal court docket found Guy Reffitt of Texas will be the first to go on trial. Reffitt has pleaded not guilty to a series of federal charges. He is accused of carrying a gun while amid the mob confronting police officers on January 6. The trial is scheduled to begin February 28 at 9 a.m., if the court does not extend its closure to most in-person operations, including juries, beyond February 7.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 FBI infiltrator into Nazis, KKK, biker gangs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/fbi-infiltrator-nazies-kkk-biker-gangs-1280830/">https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/fbi-infiltrator-nazies-kkk-biker-gangs-1280830/</a>
GIST	<p>We'll come to the homegrown terrorists he foiled and the race war they tried to foment. To the journalists he saved from assassination and the synagogue marked for carnage in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. To the gun-rights march on the steps of a state capitol, where they planned to pick off cops and rallygoers. There's time enough to valorize the work of Scott B., an undercover fed who breached far-right death squads and squashed their national web of terror cells. (Scott requested that his surname not be used for the sake of his family's safety.) Last summer, when he retired at 50 from the FBI, Scott left the bureau as one of the most storied agents since Joe Pistone, the real-life Donnie Brasco. For two-plus decades, he cracked landmark cases and won every laurel they give to undercover. Months out of the game, though, he can't stop brooding over the threat he left behind. He knows better than anyone that it's later than we think, and that each day brings us closer to the next 9/11 — this one launched by our own children.</p> <p>But first, we need to talk about the ram. Because that ram — actually, a terrified goat with diarrhea — died for all our sins of the past four centuries.</p> <p>It is Halloween evening 2019, and Scott — undercover coordinator for the FBI and special agent dispatched to its Joint Terrorism Task Force — is shivering in three layers, including tactical gear, in the pitch-black woods of northern Georgia. He has infiltrated a domestic-terror group called the Base, posing as a former skinhead who calls himself PaleHorse and is expert in hand-to-hand combat. Scott and 11 Base members are walking an unmarked path to a clearing above a creek bed. He doesn't know most of the men he's with; they've come from far distances to this encampment on a farm for a four-day training block on guerrilla warfare. Five of them traveled from Northeast states with assault rifles and armor in their car trunks. Another, a young psycho who calls himself ZoomGnat, has been up for two days straight on Adderall and Red Bull and has driven from Texas without stopping. None of them call one another by their given names, only their noms de guerre: Pestilence, PunishSnake, BigSiege, etc. Several are ex-military with munitions training and the wherewithal to take out power stations. Others are self-taught tactical freaks who shoot and move as nimbly as paratroopers. The internet will teach you anything these days, including how to start a race war in three steps.</p> <p>The day had broken mild but turned bone-cold later, and was now, after many hours of slanting rain, a misery of mud and wind. When they came to the clearing, the members lit torches and formed a circle around the fire. Incantations were spoken by one of the men, citing the Wild Hunt and other gross misreadings of pre-Christian and Norse mythology. And then — because this was a sacrament not to the gods but to the massacre of Jews, Blacks, and gays — it was time to sacrifice the trembling animal they'd kidnapped from a neighbor's farm.</p> <p>The goat, all 80-something pounds of him soaking wet, was shitting and bleating in prostrate fear of these men in death masks and camo. The man leading the ritual — code name: Eisen — swung the machete overhead. He hesitated a moment, then brought the blade down; it bounced off the animal with a whomp. Goats aren't built for ritual kills, as it happens: The scruffs of their necks are double-reinforced with back straps of gristle and fur. After further attempts at holy butchery, someone had the bright idea to just shoot the thing already. But this, too, quickly became a clusterfuck. Eisen looked away as he pointed the pistol — and the members, after all, were in a circle. One of them could have died if he misfired.</p>

And so Scott, who in real life is a sniper-grade marksman and who teaches his fellow agents how to shoot, stepped in to school the young neo-Nazi on the rudiments of gun safety. But the goat didn't die after a single head shot; its legs kept flailing, as if to taunt Eisen for being such a weasel. Finally, Eisen put a second slug in him. Now, the dark sacrament could begin.

Someone slit the animal's throat and filled a chalice with the blood that came glomping out. The men passed the chalice around the fire, each taking sips from the cup. By the time it got to Scott, though, the blood had somehow chunked into dim-sum lumps of plasma and — oh, hell no, he's not drinking that mess. He dipped a pinky into the chalice and touched it to his lips as one of the men began to vomit. Not a genteel purge but the full-boat Linda Blair, the contents of his dinner spraying the trees. Sweet Jesus, Scott thought as he looked around the campfire at these misfits in training for mayhem. He was the only Christian at this devil's mass, and the only functional adult on hand. While some of the others took hits of acid and spooked themselves by talking to the severed goat's head, Scott stood as close to the fire as he could. "It was so fucking cold, and I couldn't warm up in my truck: I was taping the whole thing on audio recorder."

Scott is telling this story in the study of his farmhouse high up a hill in the Appalachians. It hunches like a fort on its timbered perch, with assault rifles and armor in the linen closet and kill-shot sight lines of the unmarked road running past his drive. As he talks, he screens footage that he took of those men through a hidden cam on his person. It was wildly risky work, taping terrorists with long guns in woods miles from his support team. It is no less risky to be showing this film and revealing these details for mass consumption. Scott has never been named in public, even at criminal trials. So thorough was the evidence he gathered covertly that every defendant he ever arrested pleaded out.

But he's breaking his covenant now for the reason he took that footage: He is haunted by what the people onscreen will do if their movement — and their moment — aren't thwarted. Over months of interviews with Scott and his former colleagues, hours-long conversations with domestic-terror experts, and wormhole dives down fascist portals on apps like Gab and Discord, a portrait emerged of a nation under threat from a thousand points of hate. "We've seen massive increases in plots and acts" committed by domestic terrorists, says Bruce Hoffman, a Georgetown professor and counterterror authority whose *Inside Terrorism* is the master text on the subject. "Me and my team lay awake nights kicking the walls, because there's a million-and-a-half guys online plotting murder," says Rita Katz, the founder and director of the SITE Intelligence Group, and the author of the forthcoming *Saints and Soldiers*, which tracks the rise of far-right terror in the age of Trump. "We're in a business where we can't be wrong once," says Scott. "And there's way more of them than us undercovers."

I ask him how he endured those spectral hours in the company of such fools. Scott stiffens and pulls up pictures on his phone.

"This," he flashes the photo of a teen with a bowl haircut and a sunk-chest, scarecrow build, "is Dylann Roof. He killed nine people in a church."

"And this," he flashes the photo of a crew-cut dork in glasses, "is Patrick Crusius. He's charged with killing 23 at a Walmart in Texas. So don't think for a second you can read these boys by how they look on Twitter."

Then Scott fetches up a meme he pulled off one of the apps where rageful kids meet up. It is a viral poster of the so-called saints who inspire white terrorists worldwide. At the top is Saint Breivik — as in Anders Breivik, the Norwegian who slaughtered 69 people at a summer camp for kids, and another eight in Oslo with a van bomb. Just below him is Saint Tarrant — as in Brenton Tarrant, the Australian who murdered 51 people in a pair of New Zealand mosques. Two down from him is Robert Bowers, the Pennsylvania trucker who allegedly slew 11 at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. This meme is a totem pole for Nazi youth in training, the standings in a pennant race of killers. Bracketing their stat lines is a phrase in block chalk: "Will you make it onto the leaderboard ... in the fight for white survival?"



Scott doesn't look like any guardian you've met, unless by "guardian" you mean the cooler at a Vegas strip joint who keeps the drunks off the girls with a black-eyed glare. He's been lifting all his life and has the setup to prove it: mail-box quads and meat-plow arms that dispose him to sleeveless tees. At six feet four and 260 pounds, he fills up a room without meaning to, though he never wastes time trying to merge with his surroundings. He's funny and profane and could charm a lampshade off its base with his whiskey-sour drawl and Harley swagger. Small wonder that even strangers at the Quik Mart call him Tex, though he's as much from Amarillo as you or me.

But being a giant with full tat sleeves is its own disguise: No one sees you and thinks "plainclothes cop" hiding cameras in your leathers. That's the trademark of a crack undercover: a genius for playing yourself. "What I do isn't acting, 'cause acting'll get you killed," says Scott. "I'm just out here being darker shades of me." He tartly describes his targets — homicidal bikers who beat their victims with hammers; racist gangsters who pimp out their women under the sobriquet "Aryan angels" — as "my ass-out country cousins," rednecks raised in the same locus he was but who went right when he went left. "If I hadn't've played [foot]ball in college and been friends with lots of Black guys, I might've shared a few of their views," he says. Scott drains the last of his third Jack Daniel's — he drinks the stuff like seltzer — then laughs at the thought of espousing hate. "Yeah, nah, probably not. I ain't big on stupid."

Still, playing Klansmen and hired killers, he had the chops to infiltrate homegrown terror. For 28 years in law enforcement — first as an investigator a year out of college at a county sheriff's office in the Carolinas, then as a shooting star at the FBI — he's been working his way into, and out of, tight spaces, breaching outfits that chop up cop impostors. Sitting in the crates he brought home when he retired are the field notes and transcripts of every case he's worked. They corroborate the accounts he's giving here and chart the plagues of the past three decades — the flood tide of drugs from the five cartels penetrating our southern border; the poisoning of the suburbs by Big Pharma and the opioid mills they helped spawn; and the radioactive gush of white supremacy through the fire hose of social media. Scott seems almost wistful now to recall the Nineties, when the bogeyman in America was crack cocaine.

By his count, there are 600 FBI agents who are certified as UCEs (undercover employees). But some of them do the work of "backstopping" agents: creating false credentials and social media profiles for UCEs working in the field. Of the several hundred people who do face-to-face ops, most have only handled a couple of cases as the primary undercover. "There's maybe 50 in the country who've done five or more ops — and then the rare few who've done double digits," says Shawn McAlpin, a prolific UCE who retired to run a cannabis dispensary. Scott has done dozens, though they tend to run together; he has, after all, a type. "No one's gonna send me in on corporate crimes; my country ass would be laughed out of the boardroom," he says.

And so he made his name doing the dirty jobs, often juggling several ops at once. He infiltrated the Outlaws — a national biker gang that rivals the Hells Angels in size — and sent 16 members or their associates to prison for guns, drugs, extortion, and violent crimes. Hours before they swung a huge dope deal one night, they summoned Scott to their clubhouse in Taunton, Massachusetts. Scott was kitted out with his standard trousseau: a tiny camera and a recording chip secreted on his person (it would breach tradecraft to say precisely where). They ordered him — at gunpoint — to get naked.

Scott was stunned; he'd been undercover for 18 months and committed six crimes with them already. (Or so they thought.) "Not gonna lie to you: My asshole was knittin' a sweater, going chicka-chicka-chicka as I stripped," he says. They searched Scott and his garments, but missed the microcamera — a providence he chalks up to his god. Later, at one of the strip joints they called home, his adrenaline dump turned to rage. "Fuck you, motherfuckers," Scott hissed, turning purple. "Tomorrow, before the drop, I'm making all you bitches strip!"

Next up was Operation Poetic Justice: a sheriff's office in the hillbilly South dealing drugs, untaxed cigarettes, and taking bribes. "There was so much corruption, it seeped into government, because everyone was related up there," says Mike MacLean, Scott's FBI supervisor in Knoxville. Before Scott and his team took down 50 people, including cops and their family members, he was sitting with a deputy's relative one night when the guy pulled a shotgun, hammers cocked. "I find out you the law, you a dead man," said the

relative, baring his toothless gums in a snarl. Months later, after the takedown, Scott sat with the man again, introducing himself as FBI. “Aw, hell, I knew you was law the whole time,” said the relative. “Yeah?” said Scott, who hears that often, post-arrest. “Then why’d you sell me coke for a year?” “Oh, that’s ’cause I like you,” said the man.

Compound that criminal dementia with fanaticism and you get the pretzel logic of white power. In the hate groups that he breached, Scott encountered credos that only cracked-out satirists could conceive. One night, he sat up drinking bourbon with a Klansman who laid out the dual-seed theory. In the Garden of Eden, it was Adam, Eve, and Abel, and Abel, born of Adam, sired the white race. Then came the snake with forbidden fruit — only, the “fruit” was Eve sleeping with the snake. The snake, being Satan, fathered Cain and the mud people, starting off with the Jews. Then, you got your Blacks, gays, commies, and Asians: They’re all the seed of Satan, too. Christians can kill them and it ain’t a sin to do so, since they’re hell spawn who don’t have souls.

The names of the demons changed as Scott roved the racist circuit: lizard people, beasts of the field, short-faced bears. The rules changed, too, even under the same flag. Aryan Nation disciples in the state of Tennessee trafficked dope and guns and pimped their girls on Backpage, often to Black and brown johns. This raised the hackles of the Right Rev. Richard Butler, who’d founded Aryan Nations in the Seventies. From his compound in Idaho, he sent cease-and-desist letters to those crystal-tweaking heathens down South. For months, he harassed them to change their name; they told him to go fuck himself. Finally, Butler capitulated: They could call themselves Aryan Nation if they studied Scripture with him. And so it came to pass: The Tennessee apostates got religion and kept selling speed to all comers. Scott busted that crew in 2018, sending 44 members to the pen. “For all their Christian bullshit, they were moving tons of product,” he says, and using the criminal proceeds to grow their base.

Asked if he’d challenged them to square the contradiction, Scott lets out a snort. “I’m talking to this neo-Nazi and said, ‘Why do y’all hate Blacks so much?’ He goes, ‘They’re lazy, and they mooch off their family and the county.’ I said, ‘OK, so where you living these days?’ ‘Um, well, right now, I’m staying by my girlfriend’s mama’s.’ ‘Right, and what do you do for work?’ ‘Well, I’m kinda between jobs at the moment.’ I just started laughing and said, ‘Is it me, or are you the very thing you just described hating?’”

If Scott had done nothing but “enterprise crimes” — drug gangs, corrupt cops, human-trafficking cases — he’d have blazed a big trail at the bureau. But he was spinning his wheels working narcotics rips and badly wanted out of that box. So in 2015, he arranged his own transfer to the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Tennessee. Created by the bureau in 1980, JTTFs are regional strike teams blending feds, cops, troopers, and linguists tracking terror threats at home. Back then, no one in Washington deemed the far-right groups a high-priority target. “For several years, our unit had been a lackluster crew, not known for having ass kickers,” says Scott. That changed in a hurry with him around. He built the case on the Aryan Nations that lasted 18 months. The windfall payoff in arrests and seizures showed DTOS — the Domestic Terror command in Washington — “that you could bring major cases against white supremacists, and that we needed more bodies” to do so, he adds.

The bureau soon doubled the size of his team; Scott spread his reach to other states. Posing as an outlaw biker, he infiltrated a Klan cell suspected of making ghost guns for sale. One night in a remote field in Scottsboro, Alabama, they blindfolded him and ordered him to his knees: He was “naturalized,” or inducted, by a green-gowned wizard. For months, he attended their Klan Kraft Klases and played Lynyrd Skynyrd at their rallies. Scott, who shreds like a poor man’s Dave Mustaine, would get four songs in and run out of suitable numbers. “You can’t rock Hendrix for the Klan,” he says. So he’d wail Southern standards as they doused their 30-foot torch with diesel fuel.

At those Klan meetups, Scott caught wind of a man who was bent on bad intentions. “He’d post pictures of synagogues on his Facebook page and say, ‘I’m gonna do something big.’” Scott arranged to meet the man while posing as a closer. (The closer is the guy who supplies the “iron,” be it a gun or bomb for an attack.) On Jan. 12, 2017, he picked up Benji McDowell at his home in Conway, South Carolina; they drove to Myrtle Beach to talk targets. “This was right around the time Dylann Roof was on trial,” says Scott. “Benji said he wanted to do something in the style of Roof, only on a grander scale.”

Scott wasn't sure what to make of McDowell, an overstuffed pillow of a 30-year-old stoner who came off as a soft-brained teen. Countless idiots shitpost heinous threats but lack the will or means to see them through. Scott made McDowell for one of those losers, a sense compounded when he sparked up a joint in the back seat of Scott's sedan. "Put that out!" Scott barked at him, boiling mad. "You don't know what I got in the trunk, or what my priors are!" McDowell was so scared that he swallowed the joint. He later threw up in a parking lot.

But that night, Scott got a call from Benji: "I want a 40-cal and hollow points." Scott returned in February to deliver the gun — minus firing pin, of course. "He was good to go in the next week or two," says Scott. "He had intel on an event at a temple [in Myrtle Beach] where lots of kids and families would be present." The drop-off happened at Scott's motel. Cops swarmed McDowell in the car park. Later, at the station, he gave a rueful confession. "I'm glad y'all stopped me when you did," said McDowell. "I was fixin' to do something bad." Scott notes that McDowell got a wrist slap — 33 months in prison for an illegal weapon. "The loophole is, there's no domestic-terror law: You can't bust a guy for saying 'All Jews must die.' So you wind up working whatever charge you can just to get 'em off the street."

He had no time to brood about sentence guidelines, though: There was another plot afoot at an industrial plant. A white man enraged at his Black superiors sought a bomb to blow up the place. Scott reached out to him through a source, posing again as a closer. But leery of leaving a voice trail, the man declined to talk. Instead, he texted Scott the thing he was after: an emoji of a bomb going ka-boom. After months of pinging from his personal phone, the perp switched his aim to the home of his bosses, who happened to be a married couple. Travis Dale Brady was pinched when he took possession of a dummy bomb delivered by the feds. "He was no wiz at op-security," says Scott, "but stupid people kill people all the time. Like the other guy [McDowell], he had the heart and drive to do it. And last time I checked, dead is dead."

Scott couldn't have known it at the time, of course, but he was feeling the first tremors underfoot: a wave of white terror that built in 2017 and has been breaking on our beaches ever since. There were horrific hate-based murders in New York and Portland, Oregon, that spring. Then, come summer, the deluge: Charlottesville, Virginia. For two days, men with long guns paraded Nazi flags through the streets of that quaint town. Cops and troopers stood by, watching, as dozens were injured in a festival of hate and horror. But even the footage of James Fields Jr. plowing his Dodge into a crowd, then backing up and hitting even more pedestrians after killing Heather Heyer, didn't center domestic terror as a frontline threat. "That whole time, I had to fight like hell to keep my Aryan Nation op alive," says Scott. "The International Terror Section were the big dogs. We in DTOS weren't deemed as important."

He and his fellow agents were flummoxed. There were groups at that rally plotting mass destruction, the worst of them the Atomwaffen Division. A global gang of white boys in their teens and early twenties, they'd been baptized in fire by the teachings of James Mason, whose banned book, *Siege*, is a syllabus for racists. Mason, a graying neo-Nazi living quietly in northern Colorado, has been grooming sociopaths since the early Eighties. He's one of the founding fathers of the "accelerationist" movement: a ragtag consortium of far-right ragers who think society's on the brink of full collapse. The job of accelerationists is to speed the plow, springing attacks on people and institutions that set the stage for race war in the streets. In that banquet of blood — the "boogaloo," as they call it — the ones with the biggest guns will prevail. Then, the terrorists can claim their caliphate: a bone-white ethnostate, armed to the teeth, that is by, for, and about the master race.

But Mason's goons in Atomwaffen were fuzzy about their targets. One of them, Nicholas Giampa, killed his girlfriend's parents because they didn't want her dating a white supremacist. Another, Devon Arthurs, killed his two roommates, both Atomwaffen boys. A third member, Samuel Woodward, stabbed his date to death after a gay hookup in California.

Those slayings were the stumbles of a lethal bunch. Three members — all Marines in a cell at Jacksonville's Camp Lejeune — were planning to take out power plants with homemade thermite bombs. They'd already formed a "death squad" and were selling no-trace rifles to conspirators around the state. A member in Las Vegas targeted a local temple; he aimed to detonate an IED, then pick off panicked

congregants as they fled. These kids were such bloodcurdling posters on Gab that the feds finally acted in 2018. They sent Scott west, as part of an undercover squad, to the Destroying Texas Fest that summer. Black-metal bands with names like Satanic Goat Ritual were playing at a club in Houston; several Atomwaffen members would be there. One of the plans was for Scott, et al., to stage a “cold bump”: One of them would pick a fight with the leader, John Cameron Denton, then Scott would jump in to “save” him. As it turned out, they didn’t have to fake the brawl. Other agents infiltrated Denton’s cell and arrested him and five others for plots against reporters, Blacks, and Jews. That freed Scott for his biggest case: the seven-month op to smash the Base.

If you’re a top producer for the FBI, your career can take one of two paths. Some time in your thirties, you’re encouraged to climb the ladder by applying for the position of SSA (supervisory special agent). There’s a big bump in salary, you may get home in time for dinner, and it’s a straight shot up to the boss’s job. Alas, the great undercovers shun that route, disdainful as they are of careerist cops. “Guys like us don’t think of climbing the ladder; we crave this shit too much to want to stop,” says McAlpin, the retired UCE. Instead, stars like Scott often stay in their lane and build their brand by becoming master teachers. By the time he switched over to Domestic Terror in 2015, Scott was the tactical instructor of his division, and ran its firearms-qualification courses. He was also a tough-love mentor at the Undercover School, a two-week crucible of stress and sleep loss that breaks some of the candidates who enroll. “It’s a horrific experience because it has to be; we’re preparing you for the worst of the worst,” says Terry Rankhorn, an undercover coordinator and master instructor who retired in 2019. “You’ll have guns at your head, a rope around your neck; we’ve never killed anyone, but we’ve air-lifted students to hospitals.”

Scott was in Phoenix to train online coverts when he ran into a compadre from Ohio. He and “Jim,” a veteran cop assigned to Joint Terror, were the Hans and Franz twins of undercover: two hyper-muscled men with full-dress Harleys and enough tats to start a biker gang. Each of them had heard the buzz about the Base and wanted to get a case going fast. So one night, they bought a fifth of their favorite poison and stayed up building Scott an alias. Using fascist pen names, they made his social media a fount of Holocaust slurs. But try as they might, it proved problematic to get booted off Facebook, or “Jewbook,” as young racists like to call it. A screenshot of your ouster is a very useful chip if you’re seeking instant cred with terror groups.

So Scott took it on himself to just tag the Base directly. He wrote to the web address they posted on Gab, going by WhiteWarrior88. That night, they emailed him a questionnaire. Several days of back-and-forth led to a voice chat with some of the members, including a man calling himself Roman Wolf. Scott was asked about his combat skills and what he was willing to risk for his beliefs. Accelerationists love to boast that they’re leaderless cells, and that their crypto skills shield them from being breached. But it had taken Scott a day to reach the Base online, and a week to speak to their leader directly.

Said leader, Roman Wolf — real name: Rinaldo Nazzaro — was no blood-and-soil warlord whose hateful worldview stemmed from combat horrors. Wolf graduated prep school in New Jersey and dropped out of Villanova, where he presented himself as an anarchist opposed to government meddling. He had nothing in common with the Base kids he exhorted to “finish” what Hitler started. Those boys were dirt-floor loners in the rural South, while Wolf and his wife lived comfortably in Russia after leaving America in 2018. Everything about him sounded gassy and self-inflated, from his credentials as a mercenary in the Middle East theater to his counterterror chops at an intel firm. There is evidence that he worked for the Department of Homeland Security from 2004 to 2006, but he didn’t learn much tradecraft on the job. The firewall he built around his white-terror op has been breached, time and again, by media types. He bought land, for instance, in Washington state to stage hate camps for the Base, but the site was doxxed by a Vice reporter and swarmed by antifa types. The kids in his western cell quickly quit the group, and Wolf had to start all over in the East.

The day after his interview, Scott was asked to join the Base. Wolf put him in touch with the nearest cell leader — a guy in Rome, Georgia, named Luke Lane. “I didn’t know it then, but he was the bastard we’d been hunting under his call name, TMB [The Militant Buddhist],” says Scott. “Outta all of ’em in the cell, Lane was the most gonzo. He’d be up till dawn posting seriously crazy shit.” A week or two later, Scott drove to meet Lane near a statue of a — yes, lord — Roman wolf. Lane, 20, and Pestilence, 19,

approached Scott in the standard issue of young fascists: black BDUs bloused into combat boots. Lane told Scott to put his cell on airplane mode, then wanded him with a contraption he'd never seen. "It was this detector that picks up waves from any recording device — and my team had put a tracker on my truck," says Scott.

Two thoughts went through him in a blur: This'll be the shortest undercover in history (it wasn't — he'd parked under a power line, fuzzing the rod's reception), and How are these kids buying equipment the FBI doesn't have? That question, or something like it, came up again all weekend as he scoped out the armory they'd amassed. Each member of the Base who came to Lane's place had a kit he could hit the ground with in Tikrit. Set aside their long guns with which they aired out Star of David targets. What stunned Scott was all their ancillary gear: bulletproof vests with ceramic plates that could stop an AK round, and loaded battle-rattles holding gas masks and mag clips and everything you'd need in a firefight. "These boys were tight," says Scott in grudging awe. "Their shoot-and-move skills, their magazine dumps — for home-schooled dudes, they were pretty squared away."

Scott says Lane lived on a farm that wasn't fit for habitation. There was a house on the property encircled by trash, but that was somehow rented to a tenant. Lane and his father bunked in the loft of their converted barn, where they shared a kitchen and bathroom with Lane's sister. The father worked construction and was gone all day, but neither his son nor Lane's best friend had a job. Pestilence — real name: Jacob Kaderli — was an unemployed teen who somehow scrounged the cash to pay for combat gear. Helter-Skelter — real name: Michael Helterbrand — was the only Georgia member with a steady check. He worked in IT. Lane was the oddest of the three, though, says Scott: an eighth-grade dropout who'd quit school to read Mein Kampf and trade firearms online all night. Scott never saw his bedroom, but heard from the other members that it harbored an arsenal. "That's how he had money to buy new gear," says Scott. "Buying and selling on armslist.com."

At night, after hours of training maneuvers and honing their Sieg Heil poses, the Base boys would sit beneath an awning by the barn, drinking Jägermeister and trading tin-foil theories. "Pestilence would be talking about the Earth being concave, that Hitler proved it by firing rockets that came down," says Scott. "Then someone would say, 'No, bullshit. Hitler's living in Middle Earth, along with a race of giants.'" And Lane would declaim against the "ZOG," or the Zionist Occupied Government [of America]. For all their pagan bluster and dreams of an ethnostate, Scott couldn't help but ask these sex-starved boys how they planned to sire the master race. "Oh, that's easy," said one of them. "We'll just kidnap bitches and rape 'em till they give us kids."

There was a lot of this sort of thing over the next three months. Scott (rechristened PaleHorse) drove to Georgia twice a month and met his support team at their off-site. Installed in a defunct schoolhouse, the feds wired him up to record for two days straight. (They also flew a plane overhead that filmed the group's movements from four miles up.) For 48 hours, his backups eavesdropped as the Base boys burned Bibles and U.S. flags, cut themselves to bleed on blocks of Norse runes, and raged against Jesus and "the rest of his fucking Jews." What the feds didn't hear were the names and dates of targets; the Georgia cell took pains to speak vaguely. Scott sensed they were hatching something, but couldn't get them to say it. Meanwhile, his case kept getting bigger.

Sometime in August, three other men showed up; one became a fixture at the farm. He had a fringy beard and was evasive about his background, but his Manitoba twang gave him away. Patrik Mathews was a corporal in the Canadian Reserves trained in explosives who'd fled Canada after being outed as a neo-Nazi by a reporter. Half the FBI was looking for Mathews, who'd snuck across the border weeks before. Members of the Georgia cell were awed by his prowess and his commitment to the cause. Lane's father let him stay at the farm, where, per Scott, Mathews slept in a horse stall for two months.

Then there were the other two who'd come down with him. Can't-Go-Back — real name: Brian Lemley — was an Army vet and truck driver who'd scooped up Mathews near the border and harbored him for a while in Virginia. Eisen — real name: William Bilbrough — was another middle-earthier and self-taught ninja whose martial skills weren't worth a damn. Those three wanted to start a race war ASAP. Mathews, who'd named himself PunishSnake, had the self-assurance of the psychotic. He was, he said, "invisible,"

the perfect killing machine because, as far as anyone knew, he was dead. Drunk or sober, he'd foam at the mouth about downed power lines and poisoned water supplies. That fall, when they formed their own cell in Delaware, Mathews and Lemley built a ghost gun from parts, hatched plans to assassinate cops for their weapons, and roughed out a plot on a gun rally on the Capitol steps in Virginia.

Meanwhile, Scott was under blue-flame pressure to bust the Georgia cell. It is murderously expensive to build a multistate op on a terror group that keeps growing. By October, the feds had dozens of members in their sights, and offices from New York to L.A. were opening cases against suspects in their region. Scott would man the phones once a week at 10 a.m., briefing the other teams about his progress. Sometimes, he says, "there were a hundred people on the line — and a whole bunch of backstabbing" going down. Alliances and antipathies formed between regions: "Some of us divisions were on the same sheet of music, saying 'Where's the imminent threat? Just play this out.' Whereas other teams were like, 'These guys are unstable! People are gonna die if we don't move.'"

Well, of course, they're unstable, Scott thought but didn't say. That's what I'm counting on.

It is, to corrupt Tolstoy, a truth self-evident: Every unhappy family is alike. The Base, a paranoid clan with no shared past or people skills, was rigged to explode before it fired the first shot or laid its first bomb outside a church. Scott says Lane, who'd idolized Mathews in August, was plotting to blow his brains out that fall. He'd had it with Mathews' "fed talk" — the loosey-goosey mentions of murder and mayhem that draw the eyes and ears of the FBI. Also — and this was a problem — Mathews "knew too much," mostly because Lane had spilled his plans to him.

That Halloween weekend, Lane and Pestilence shared those plans with Scott. Sitting around a campfire after everyone else had left, they told him to put his phone on ice. "We've developed targets" we're going after, said Pestilence. Lane didn't divulge names, but wanted to know if Scott was up for whatever. "Brothers, you know this," said Scott. "Just tell me when and where — and give me a couple days to clear the decks."

Just before Thanksgiving, Scott got a blast on Wire, via a channel used only by the cell. Be back here in mid-December, said Lane, and bring your whole kit "for a family-friendly camping trip." Scott drove down there on the appointed day, making sure to arrive before the others. "Whattaya got?" he asked Lane, just the two of them by the barn. We're gonna go whack some people, Lane whispered: an antifa couple living an hour away. "Well, dang," said Scott, trying to stall for time. "That ain't nothin' I want to drive my personal truck to." He peppered Lane with questions: Who lives in the house with them? Are there children and pets present? How close is their bedroom to the neighbors?

Lane admitted he knew none of those things; he agreed to delay the hit to do recon. "Forget it," said Scott. "I'll get the intel myself." His cover job — site surveying — gave him credentials to pull deeds and housing floor plans. He slow-walked that "research" and took a stealth trip up North, training with Mathews and Lemley in Delaware. The two cells had come to truly loathe each other, and Scott worked the rift on both ends. "I don't like the way Lane treats you guys," he said. "We're supposed to be on the same side." Mathews entreated him to join their cell, then let him in on the plot.

Sitting in their flat in Newark, Delaware, Scott sipped his whiskey and nodded as they sketched it out. There was a Second Amendment rally in Virginia, they said, that figured to be a powder keg. Democrats had just taken power in the state and were planning stiff gun-control measures. While tens of thousands of people milled the Capitol steps, they'd set up in a tree line a hundred yards back and start picking off cops and troopers. A circular firing squad would spark off: Cops would shoot the gun nuts, gun nuts would shoot antifa, and bystanders would be cut down in the middle. As Scott winked at a wall cam that the feds installed while the two men were off at work, Mathews rambled on about his plans. After the rally, they'd slip away and become a roving death squad, posing as homeless men to stalk their targets. At night, gloved and hooded, they'd follow a reporter to his car, put a couple rounds in the back of his head, then move to the next city and lefty target.

Scott had gotten enough to bag the Delaware cell. But he needed a little luck now to take down the Georgia crew. It doesn't suffice to tape people talking murder — they actually have to do something to further that plot in order for charges to stick. It was January 2020, and the window was closing fast. If Scott didn't act before the rally in nine days, the Georgia cell would scatter once Mathews fell.

On Jan. 12, Scott drove back to Rome: Lane announced that the hit was going down. Scott's pulse raced when he heard what they'd acquired. They had bought catch bags for their brass — sacks that clip to the ejection ports of rifles and catch the expended shells as they pour out. They had drilled a silencer for a pistol, and would go out and buy frog tape to cinch their pant legs so they didn't leave stray skin cells at the scene. (They also said they'd grab a package of adult diapers, having heard that people shit themselves doing their first murder.) Scott, for his part, produced some images of the house, but couldn't get the list of current tenants. "Well, whatever," said Helter-Skelter. "If there's kids there, let's whack 'em. I got no problem killing commie kids."

The original plan was for Helter to drive and the other three to go in blazing. But Helter had changed his mind: He wanted "to pop his cherry" instead of waiting in the truck. Otherwise, the blueprint remained the same. They'd rent a single room at a dive motel; there, they'd shower up, slough their dead skin off, and change into disposable murder gear. Scott would steal a truck with out-of-state plates, and someone would bring accelerants to torch the house. They'd be in and out in minutes, murder everything that moved, and leave behind a fireball for the cops.

On Jan. 15, Scott called on Lane to take him out to lunch. Driving out of the farm, he turned off the dirt road when he heard an odd noise from his pickup. "Fuck!" he said to Lane as he pulled over. "If this truck's messin' up on me again..."

He got out and walked to the back of the truck when another pickup passed him on the road. The driver stopped and asked Scott if he needed help. While they talked, an armored BearCat came over the hill, a gunner in the turret with an M-4. Scott and the other driver dove into the truck and tore off. A SWAT team surrounded Lane, guns drawn.

A couple of hours later, a team arrested Pestilence at his house two hours south, near Atlanta. His parents feigned innocence about their son's intentions, but Scott claims otherwise. "Pest said he would show his dad videos of our training sessions; hell, he said his dad used to take him to the gun range."

At five that afternoon, cops arrested Helter-Skelter as he left his IT job in Georgia. The three cell members were held without bail and booked for a raft of crimes: conspiracy to commit murder, arson, home invasion, and — eventually — animal cruelty to that goat. The next day, Jan. 16, SWAT teams in two cities rolled up Mathews, Lemley, and Bilbrough. BigSiege — real name: Yousef Barasneh — was busted with a second member for defacing houses of worship. Lanzer — real name: Richard Tobin — was charged with conspiracy in those crimes: He was the one who'd planned a nationwide assault on churches and temples. Months later, cops got ZoomGnat — real name: Duncan Trimmell — the deranged kid who'd driven all the way from Texas to take part in the Halloween gore. So, too, Dima — real name: Brandon Ashley; both were charged for beheading a goat.

In all, the bureau snared 11 members, effectively ending the group. So strong was the proof Scott gathered against them that they all took pleas and prison bids. Not so Nazzaro, the leader of the Base, who denies any part in their plots. At this writing, he sits, impregnable, at his redoubt in Russia, far beyond the reach of law enforcement. There, he recruits his next band of racists, protected by the U.S. Constitution. Still an American citizen, he has the First Amendment right to polemicize the slaughter of civilians. Does he crave the fall of government and the erasure of Blacks and Jews, or are those just the tantrums of a middle-age troll from the dark side of the moon? For all anyone knows, he's an FSB proxy who cares only about planting false flags.

While on the subject of false flags: That antifa couple in Georgia? They were neither antifa nor a couple. Far from living together, they were total strangers who were photographed side by side at a rally. But that



is what happens when you recruit child soldiers who can't read a caption below a picture. You seed the soil for war in which everyone's a foe, and the killers we fear the most are our own kids.

They threw a day for Scott in his hometown when he retired; it was quite the swell affair of state. The mayor and lieutenant governor read proclamations of honor, the Domestic Terror brass flew in from D.C., and one of their senior analysts gave a toast to his heroics. "No one in this room," she said, "has any idea how many lives this man saved these last five years." She congratulated Scott on his retirement and presented him a quart of aged bourbon. On the back of the bottle was a ghost engraving: the original G-man in a fedora, toting a tommy gun.

There were a hundred people gathered there to cheer on Scott; naturally, he rocked his own party. He played them "Purple Rain" and "Pride and Joy," bending notes until they begged for help. And then he did his version of "The Devil Named Music," because that song caught the blues of the undercover: Yes, I get tired of being alone/I miss my daughter/I miss my wife/But the devil named music is taking my life. For most of three decades, he'd hardly ever been home, spending months on the road as a character with a rap sheet and a convincing cover story. "You can't play with the devil without the devil bleeding into you — and your family feels it way before you do," says Dave Redemann, an undercover instructor with 30 years' experience who trained Scott at UC school. "There's a guilt he has for not seeing his kids grow up, and he's one of the very few who's honest with young agents about the cost he's paid for doing this." Scott mourns the missed birthdays and the marital dust-ups, the calls from his sobbing wife "while I was halfway across the country, way overcommitted on a case." He's had spinal fusions on a back that broke twice; surgical reattachments of his biceps, knee, and shoulders; and a complete collapse in 2007, "burning the candle till it ran out of wax," he says. He'd been emptying the ocean of hate with a spoon, he says. "The shit I saw, I'm never gonna unsee."

And so, because he had to, Scott walked away cold. Closed his laptop, tossed his work phones, and logged off all the platforms: a funeral, of sorts, for his false selves. There's only so much evil you can will yourself to swallow before it turns to poison in your throat. When the back-taste overwhelms him, he gets on his Harley and rides a twisty pass through the Appalachians. There's a river up there where he sits and eyes the current, listening to the tree frogs and cicadas. They sing to him, a tune he can't make out but which takes him somewhere better down the bend.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Germany: 2 officers killed in traffic stop</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.union-bulletin.com/seattle-times/germany-2-police-officers-shot-dead-during-traffic-stop/article_461eb5e1-8f46-5a4b-b8fb-fb354fff40f9.html">https://www.union-bulletin.com/seattle-times/germany-2-police-officers-shot-dead-during-traffic-stop/article_461eb5e1-8f46-5a4b-b8fb-fb354fff40f9.html</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — Two police officers were shot dead while on a routine patrol in western Germany early Monday, police said.</p> <p>The shooting happened during a traffic check near Kusel at about 4:20 a.m., police in Kaiserslautern said in a statement.</p> <p>They said that the perpetrators fled but police had no description of them, the car they used or what direction they fled in.</p> <p>Police called on drivers in the Kusel area not to pick up hitchhikers and warned that at least one suspect is armed.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Organized crime wildlife trafficking busts</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/operation-golden-strike-disrupts-the-organized-crime-networks-behind-wildlife-trafficking/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/operation-golden-strike-disrupts-the-organized-crime-networks-behind-wildlife-trafficking/</a>
GIST	An eight-week INTERPOL operation against wildlife crime and trafficking resulted in arrests and seizures across Asia and Africa.

Codenamed Golden Strike, the operation – which ended late last year – targeted the criminals and networks smuggling wildlife protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from Africa to Asia.

During the preoperational phase, countries worked together to identify INTERPOL-wanted fugitives known to travel frequently between Africa, Asia, the US and France, and who were wanted for their involvement in trafficking ivory, rhino horn, pangolin and tiger parts between the two continents.

Intelligence shared between the 23 participating countries ahead of operations enabled investigators to target emerging wildlife trafficking routes, with officers conducting inspections at roadblocks and land, sea and airport border points throughout the August-September tactical phase.

“The world’s fourth largest illegal trade – wildlife and forestry crime – goes hand in hand with tax evasion, corruption, money laundering and even murder, with organized crime groups using the same routes to smuggle protected wildlife as they do people, weapons, drugs and other illegal products,” said Ilana de Wild, INTERPOL’s Director of Organized and Emerging Crime.

“Strong, coordinated responses such as operation Golden Strike are needed to address the activities of transnational organized crime groups involved in wildlife crime and to disrupt illegal trade chains across range, transit and destination states,” added Mrs de Wild.

Although results are still coming in, the operation has so far seen seizures of several thousand wildlife products and the identification of some 100 suspects across 23 countries, triggering worldwide arrests and further investigations linked to wildlife trafficking.

A sample of seizures so far include:

- 1,202 ivory pieces weighing more than four tonnes
- 423 kg and 78 scales of pangolin species
- 50 rhino horns weighing 72 kg
- 46 kg totoaba bladders
- More than 3,785 pieces and 52 kg of mollusks
- 42 shark teeth
- 33 red corals
- 1336 other CITES protected species
- Live specimens including turtles, tortoises and more than 120 birds

Operation Golden Strike is funded by the government of China. “Operation Golden Strike has provided a platform for the participating countries to take action in synchronicity, signaling the strong resolution of police authorities in combating such crimes,” said Duan Daqi, Head of INTERPOL’s National Central Bureau in Beijing.

Illustrating that traditional routes continue to be used by the organized crime groups behind wildlife trafficking between Africa and Asia, Malaysia authorities seized 50 rhino horns arriving illegally from Mozambique.

Likewise, international police cooperation between South Africa and Malaysia saw the arrest and prosecution of two suspects smuggling 45kg of rhino horns between the two continents.

Qatari authorities seized 10 kg of rhino horns from Mozambique bound for Vietnam, illustrating how wildlife products are increasingly transiting the Middle East countries on their way to Asia.

Operations also saw an increase in pan African trafficking, such as a seizure in the Democratic Republic of Congo of 50 kg of elephant tusks and 60 parrots bound for Uganda.

	<p>With pandemic confinement and travel restrictions over the past 18 months forcing wildlife criminals to shift from physical to digital wildlife markets, investigations saw an increase in wildlife crime committed over e-commerce sites, social media platforms and WhatsApp groups. As a result, Thailand closed down 12 sites and 20 are under investigation.</p> <p>Results also highlighted an increase in the use of birdcages to conceal and smuggle ivory, as witnessed by Singaporean Immigration and Checks Authority who seized a birdcage consignment containing 256 concealed ivory pieces. Less than a month later, they intercepted a similar shipment containing 184 ivory pieces also concealed in birdcages.</p> <p>Intelligence gathered during the operation and entered into INTERPOL's wide range of police databases has triggered associated investigations ongoing in other parts of the world, particularly in relation to cyber-enabled wildlife cases.</p> <p>Further arrests and prosecutions are anticipated as ongoing global investigations progress worldwide.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/31 Hate crime plea deals Arbery killing?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/31/us/ahmaud-arbery-hate-crime-plea-deal.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/31/us/ahmaud-arbery-hate-crime-plea-deal.html</a>
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — Prosecutors have reached a plea deal with two of the three white men facing federal hate-crimes charges for the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, 25, the Black man who was chased through a Georgia neighborhood and fatally shot, court documents show.</p> <p>But Mr. Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, denounced the pleas. In an interview late Sunday, Ms. Cooper-Jones said of the federal prosecutors: "They went behind my back. I'm totally, totally upset. My anxiety is over the roof."</p> <p>She said that federal officials had asked her earlier if she approved of a deal, and that she had told them no. Ms. Cooper-Jones said she would try to persuade a judge to reject the plea agreements in a hearing Monday morning.</p> <p>A jury in a Georgia state court found the three men — Gregory McMichael, 66, his son Travis McMichael, 35; and William Bryan, 52 — <a href="#">guilty of murder</a> in November and sentenced them to life in prison this month. All three men were set to stand trial beginning Feb. 7 in federal court on hate-crime charges and attempted kidnapping, for which they faced possible additional life sentences. Travis McMichael, who fired a shotgun at Mr. Arbery, also faced a weapons charge.</p> <p>On Sunday, federal prosecutors filed notice in U.S. District Court asking a judge to approve plea agreements for the McMichaels. Specific details about the plea deals were not included in the court filings. Nor was there any indication that an agreement had been struck with Mr. Bryan, who was involved in chasing Mr. Arbery through the neighborhood near Brunswick, Ga., in February 2020.</p> <p>During the murder trial, lawyers for Travis McMichael — who <a href="#">fired his shotgun at Mr. Arbery three times at close range</a> — had said that <a href="#">he had fired in self-defense</a>.</p> <p>Ms. Cooper-Jones said she wanted the federal trial to take place in order to put the self-defense argument to rest and to firmly establish that the men had been motivated by racism.</p> <p>Lawyers for the McMichaels and Mr. Bryan could not be reached on Sunday, nor could an official with the Justice Department.</p> <p>Mr. Arbery was unarmed when the three men chased him for several minutes through Satilla Shores, a middle-class neighborhood along Georgia's southern coast. They said they had suspected Mr. Arbery of committing property crimes in the area. In video footage of the encounter, Mr. Arbery could be seen running as his pursuers chased him in a two pickup trucks.</p>

	<p>The chase ended when Mr. Arbery and the younger Mr. McMichael met in a violent clash. Mr. Bryan captured the violence on a video clip that was widely disseminated on the internet, leading to a national outcry and allegations that the killing had amounted to a modern-day lynching.</p> <p>Prosecutors in the murder trial had considered introducing what they described as “racial” evidence, including inflammatory Facebook posts or text messages from the three men. But in the end, <a href="#">they touched only lightly on racial themes</a> in making their case to the nearly all-white jury.</p> <p>It is unclear which of these pieces of evidence, or others, might be introduced in the federal trial. In a pretrial hearing, state <a href="#">prosecutors read a text message</a> from November 2019 in which Travis McMichael used a racist slur about Black people as he described the idea of shooting a “crackhead” with “gold teeth.”</p> <p>In a federal court filing in late December, the lawyer for Mr. Bryan asked the court to exclude evidence that suggested Mr. Bryan had “racial animus” toward Black people, including racially insensitive text messages he had made around the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and witness testimony “that would suggest Bryan did not approve of his adopted daughter dating an African American man.”</p> <p>A Georgia state investigator has said that Mr. Bryan told the authorities that he heard Travis McMichael use a racist slur shortly after shooting Mr. Arbery. Mr. McMichael’s lawyers have disputed that claim.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/30 Dozens of guns stolen L.A. cargo trains</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/dozens-of-guns-among-items-stolen-from-cargo-trains-in-la/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/dozens-of-guns-among-items-stolen-from-cargo-trains-in-la/</a>
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — Dozens of handguns and shotguns were among items stolen by thieves who raided cargo containers aboard trains near downtown Los Angeles for months, authorities said.</p> <p>Police arrested three people last summer carrying new .22-caliber handguns, The Los Angeles Times reported Saturday. A trace of the weapons revealed they came from a batch of 36 handguns reported missing as they were being shipped by train to Tennessee, police officials said.</p> <p>One of the suspects said the guns had come from cargo trains in LA’s Lincoln Heights rail yards, where widespread thefts have been reported. Shortly afterward, LA police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives arrested two other suspects with shotguns. Those weapons were determined to be part of a missing shipment of 46 shotguns, the Times reported.</p> <p>Only a handful of the 82 guns known to have been stolen from trains passing through Lincoln Heights have been recovered. Investigators are not yet sure how many other weapons may have been pilfered, Capt. German Hurtado told the Times.</p> <p>“I’ve got 24 years in LAPD, ex-military, secret clearance and I have to wait 10 days to get a new firearm and these guys are going into these containers with no locks and getting guns,” said Hurtado. “These guns were unguarded, unprotected ... God knows how many guns have been stolen that way.”</p> <p>The cargo thefts gained national attention earlier this month after local TV stations showed images of thousands of discarded boxes from stolen packages blanketing the tracks.</p> <p>No mention of the stolen guns was made when Gov. Gavin Newsom recently led a cleanup of the rail yards and promised state coordination in tracking down the thieves.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Police officers targeted for violence?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.yahoo.com/gma/police-attacked-least-4-us-110120536.html">https://www.yahoo.com/gma/police-attacked-least-4-us-110120536.html</a>

At least 10 law enforcement officers were shot or killed — most around major U.S. cities — in about a week, in what criminal justice reform advocates and [a police union](#) describe as a by-product of a national violent crime crisis.

[Two officers died after a shooting in New York City last Friday, two were shot near St. Louis on Wednesday, three were injured in Houston on Thursday and two law enforcement officers were shot in Milwaukee, each on different days.](#) And on Friday, a [Kentucky State Police trooper was wounded by gunfire](#).

[Police union leaders quickly linked](#) the violence with anti-police sentiment, one going so far as to say [officers are being "hunted in the streets."](#) The unions have long suggested an erosion of respect for police in their communities could endanger officers, especially after protests for racial justice in the wake of the 2020 murder of George Floyd often featured calls to defund major police departments.

But criminal justice experts told USA TODAY there's no evidence police officers are being targeted en masse. Rather, [a documented rise in gun violence](#) is making policing an inherently more dangerous job, they say.

"The rise in police being shot by community members is coinciding with the overall rise in violent crime," said Howard Henderson, the founding director of the Center for Justice Research. The research program at Texas Southern University examines how to make the criminal justice system more equitable.

"Police happen to be some of the victims" in an ongoing "crime wave," Henderson said.

A New York City Police Department officer lights a candle at a makeshift memorial outside the New York Police Department's 32nd Precinct, near the scene of a shooting that claimed the lives of NYPD officers Jason Rivera and Wilbert Mora in the Harlem neighborhood of New York, Monday, Jan. 24, 2022.

Several concerning spikes in violent crime data, particularly in big cities, have been blamed on a myriad of reasons. As [FBI data showed](#) U.S. homicides were dramatically up in 2020, [blame for similar spikes around the country became a political debate](#), with explanations including fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, economic inequality, rising gun ownership and upheaval from protests over police killings.

Justin Nix, a criminal justice professor at the University of Nebraska Omaha said violence against police has been trending upward in recent years. But it closely follows [an uptick in U.S. violence](#).

There's little disagreement here, Patrick Yoes, National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, said. More violent crime means increased danger for officers.

But Yoes also said some movements critical of law enforcement — such as those aimed at defunding police — have left many officers feeling dehumanized: "The trend that's happening in this country is making their job less safe." It's a frightening, emotional situation for many officers, Yoes said.

Some experts have previously expressed similar concerns about anti-police sentiment: "Right now, we are seeing it all over the country, total disrespect of police officers," Maria "Maki" Haberfeld, a professor of police science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York [told The USA TODAY Network](#).

"To me, policing is one of the pillars of a democratic society. When people start attacking police, it is the end of democracy," Haberfeld said.

But it's too soon to tell whether the recent rash of high-profile incidents is the beginning of a new, upward trend, Nix said. Historical data shows violence against police often dramatically ebbs and flows month-by-month.

Nix, however, dismissed the notion that there is an ongoing, escalating "[war on police](#)." That's just "propaganda," Nix said.

	<p><a href="#">Seemingly alarming statistics about an uptick in ambush attacks</a>, for example, lack context, Nix wrote in an email. Ambushes may not be an unprovoked, targeted attack — they may happen in the normal course of dangerous police work, such as a search for a suspect who chooses to hide, then shoots officers.</p> <p>Fortunately, violence against officers remains relatively rare, retired Seattle police chief Norm Stamper said. Stamper worked in policing for over three decades in San Diego and Seattle and now is associated with Law Enforcement Action Partnership, a nonprofit group working to improve the criminal justice system.</p> <p><a href="#">Federal data cited by Stamper</a> shows dozens of professions that are more deadly than being a police officer: “Policing is less dangerous than mining, agriculture, forestry, fishing,” he said.</p> <p>Stamper worries losing that perspective is dangerous for officers, especially if concerns about officer safety become paranoia.</p> <p>“A scared cop is a dangerous cop,” Stamper said.</p> <p>But those statistics are little comfort to officers who are putting themselves in harm's way on a daily basis, Stamper acknowledged.</p> <p>“There is something different about a police officer killed in the line of duty,” Stamper said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Largest case sex abuse by a person in US?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/29/sport/university-of-michigan-robert-anderson-victims-intl-spt/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/29/sport/university-of-michigan-robert-anderson-victims-intl-spt/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)Throughout the bitter winter, during rain and snow, Jon Vaughn has alternated between sleeping in a tent or a campervan outside former University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel's house.</p> <p>A former University of Michigan and NFL football player, Vaughn is one of more than 1,000 people --- mostly men -- who says they were <a href="#">abused by athletics doctor Robert Anderson</a>, who worked for the university from 1966 to 2003 treating students across sports including football, track, and wrestling.</p> <p>Anderson, who died in 2008, subjected students, 90% of whom were men, to "sexually abusive conduct" and invasive exams, including unnecessary genital and rectal examinations, according to a <a href="#">2021 independent report commissioned by the university</a>. Many of Anderson's victims were Black -- and survivors say this has played a part in why the abuse was allowed to continue for decades.</p> <p>In his roles at the university, including director of its health service, team physician for the athletic department and a clinical instructor at the university's medical school, Anderson abused men and women from different racial backgrounds, undergraduate and graduate students, student athletes -- including <a href="#">a two-time Super Bowl champion</a> and former world-class wrestler -- and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community, the report found.</p> <p>The university missed numerous opportunities to stop him over his 37 year long career, it concluded.</p> <p>This month the university announced a <a href="#">\$490 million settlement</a> with over a thousand victims of Anderson's alleged sexual abuse, pending approval by the Michigan Board of Regents and the claimants.</p> <p>But despite the settlement, the University is still facing calls to take responsibility for its role in the abuse, which spanned more than three decades -- as well as the university's failures to address alleged present day sexual misconduct and abuse by and of students and university staff.</p>



Victims say that despite knowledge of Dr. Anderson's predatory behavior, U of M failed to take any action, and instead chose to continue enabling Dr. Anderson's abuse of vulnerable young men until his voluntary retirement in 2003.

"They've shown that over the last half century... [they're] uninterested in student safety as a priority," Vaughn, who played for U of M from 1988 to 1990 said.

"They've shown the inability to police themselves on a consistent basis, as pertains to sexual assault," he said.

Schlissel -- who was fired this month from his position as President following an anonymous complaint suggesting that he "may have been involved in an inappropriate relationship with a University employee" - has [apologized](#) for Anderson's "tragic misconduct," and said in a statement that the university is committed to resolving victims' claims.

But Vaughn, 51, who was recently diagnosed with thyroid cancer and has been protesting for more than 100 days says he will continue to sleep outside the university president's house until the University of Michigan addresses historic and alleged present day abuse, after realizing how "acute" issues of sexual assault, violence and rape are on campus.

Vaughn is also one of many involved in hundreds of individual lawsuits and a class-action lawsuits filed against the University and the Board of Regents by survivors.

### **Black men treated differently**

The allegations against Anderson mirror those against disgraced USA Gymnastics doctor [Larry Nassar](#) at Michigan State University and [Richard Strauss](#) at Ohio State University. They too were doctors who abused their trusted positions to sexually exploit college students and athletes.

With more than a thousand people -- mostly men -- coming forward to say they were abused by Anderson, attorneys representing the victims say it may be the largest case of sex abuse by a single person in the US. The scale of the alleged abuse surpasses that at Michigan State, Ohio State, and similar incidents at other US universities.

But the case has received nowhere near as much media coverage as that of the abuse of Nassar.

A disproportionate number of the victims are African American, Vaughn told CNN.

"I don't think the world right now is ready to complete that spectrum of the face of abuse and include African-American men," Vaughn told CNN.

Attorney Mike Cox, who is representing 174 victims in confidential federal court mediation with the University of Michigan told CNN that some 40% of the 1000 Anderson victims are African American men.

"We have not done a formal analysis because all are victims and viewed equally in that sense. But clearly the amount of African American victim survivors is much, much higher than their numbers in American society," Cox told CNN over email.

Black Americans represent just 13.4% of the American population.

The percentage of African American survivors is also "dramatically higher" than their percentages as part of the UM student base, Cox said.

The University of Michigan agreed to work toward a goal of 10% African American enrollment by 1973, but did not reach this goal: Black student enrollment had declined by 1987 to 5.3% of the student body



from the high of 7.7% in 1976 and never reached the 10% goal targeted by administrators in the early '70's.

From the 1980s until 1996, there was a 10% increase in African American student enrollment. However, efforts to increase African American enrollment to reflect the Michigan state's 14% Black population have been unsuccessful, according to the university.

Vaughn said it took years for him to even recognize what had happened to him as abuse, and that in communities of color, "for men to even discuss their abuse is seen as a weakness. In those communities, you're forced to be tough and strong."

"We've been fighting to have a voice, just typically in this country, for over 400 years, we're constantly and have historically been marginalized, or dehumanized in so many ways. So I really think those two factors create this perfect storm," he said.

Attorney Parker Stinar, who represents around 200 of the survivors, agreed, adding that Anderson's case has not received anywhere near as much media coverage or public recognition as other sex abuse cases because the vast majority of survivors are older, Black men.

"For Larry Nassar, you had white, 30-year-old women, whereas for Dr. Anderson, the vast majority of the survivors are Black and in their 50s, 60s and 70s. This case is overlooked in part because of that," he told CNN.

"I think our society looks down on men who are sexually abused, let alone big, strong, athletic, Black men who are sexually abused, compared to what they perceive to be innocent white women," Stinar added. "Because they have this societal influence that asks men: How can they allow themselves to be sexually abused?"

Rebecca Wanzo, professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University, St. Louis, told CNN that race plays a significant part in whether or how violence and abuse is reported by the media.

"If you don't have someone who's the face of something that they [the media] put forward, or seems like an ideal victim that people want to tell a story about, historically, that is something that can really affect the ability of a story to travel," she explained.

This, she said, is often an issue when it comes to reporting issues like sexual abuse and murder.

"Systemic violence often tends to get less attention, which is why violence against people of color, systemic violence in general, in terms of class and other factors, isn't reported," she said.

### **Racist stereotypes**

"We don't have a language to talk about Black as rapeable in the US, because the racist stereotypes of Black men as the rapist and as violent stops us from looking at data that's been collected by the CDC for the last decade," Tommy Curry, professor of philosophy and personal Chair of Africana Philosophy and Black Male Studies at The University of Edinburgh told CNN.

Nearly 1 in 5 (19.4%) non-Hispanic Black men have experienced contact sexual violence -- which includes rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact -- in their lifetime, according to the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey 2010-2012, which is the latest published data broken out by race or ethnicity.

Social psychology data shows "Black men are always perceived as being taller, more aggressive, or violent, more prone to conflict, more athletic than they actually are," Curry said.

"And it's those social perceptions that have been linked to forms of dehumanization -- likening them to apes, sorts of primal beasts and animals -- that fit into how we think of Black men, both as athletes and as kind of super predators, as superhuman."

Attendees add their signatures to a board in support of survivors of sexual abuse at a vigil outside the home of outgoing University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel October 13, 2021 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Attendees add their signatures to a board in support of survivors of sexual abuse at a vigil outside the home of outgoing University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel October 13, 2021 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Former gymnast Trinea Gonczar, who testified against Larry Nassar, told CNN that in her work supporting victims of sexual abuse, she has learned "that most men, no matter what, if they've been assaulted, they won't report based on more shame."

Nassar, the longtime doctor for the USA Gymnastics team and Michigan State University, is serving a 60-year sentence in federal prison on child pornography charges, and was also sentenced to a 40-to-175 year state prison sentence in Michigan after pleading guilty to seven counts of criminal sexual conduct.

Gonczar has been spending time with Vaughn in his protest to show solidarity with abuse survivors at the University of Michigan.

"In my case, as a privileged woman, my perpetrator is in jail, we received a settlement. I'm White, and I come from an expensive, per se, sport: you have to have money to have to be in that sport," Gonczar said.

Gonczar now works as director of development at the Avalon Healing Center, which provides support for victims of sexual abuse.

"I've had to learn that I am a privileged, White person, and all abuse is not the same," she said.

There are several reasons why Black men choose not to report abuse, Curry told CNN.

"We know from interviews with Black male victims that it's not only the pressures of not being believed -- but it's also being perceived as the aggressor," he explained.

Curry said that his research had shown that in domestic violence cases, Black men would stay in situations of abuse, or they would not report victimization.

"They fear that the police or the criminal justice system or society is going to view them as the perpetrator and they'll be criminalized even harsher than the kinds of abuse and violence that they suffer," Curry said.

When Black men report that they have been victimized by others, "different stereotypes activate", Curry added.

"A lot of racists would say, 'No, he was really the aggressor, he tried to rape me, I wouldn't rape a man. It wasn't me. This person was violent or aggressive, or he's a drug dealer, a thief.'"

"All these racial stereotypes are utilized to undercut the credibility of Black men who are victims in ways that other groups don't have to deal with," he said.

#### **Conditions that enable abuse**

Attorney Stephen Estey told CNN that Anderson was easily able to take advantage of his victims. "Some of these men, they came from the inner city [which had] not the best healthcare in the back of the day," Estey, who represents some 80 survivors, said.

"Some of them never had a physical [examination], and so they didn't know what a physical should have been. And Dr. Anderson would tell them, if you want to play football, it's part of the process," Estey told CNN.

Wanzo said that a nationwide commitment to protecting athletic programs "particularly makes Black people vulnerable in the US because they are disproportionately often in some of these programs."

Anderson first served as a University Health Services doctor and was moved to the Athletic Department in 1981 after "credible reports of misconduct" were relayed to the then Assistant Vice President of Student Services Thomas Easthope in late 1978 or 1979, according to the WilmerHale report.

"The fact that they switched him out of general care to the athletic program as if they [athletes] were sort of disposable people says a lot about how the institution thought about how to deal with the problem person: they value athletics as institution, but the people who participate in athletics and make some money are disposable."

Vaughn told CNN that there are a "number of dynamics" aside from race that help perpetuate "this culture of abuse in sport."

"I think it is the athlete's dedication to this specific sport, and the overwhelming trust that they tend to have in their coaches and trainers because of the focus that it takes to be successful in sport," Vaughn said.

Coaches and medical staff are often the most powerful people in a child and student athlete's life, he added.

If sports create the perfect conditions for abuse, then institutions are failing to regulate themselves, survivors say.

"It's really the institutions that are protecting their brands, and the position that they hold within that sport, because they really want that sport to be a catalyst for their financial gain instead of taking concern about their sports doctors who are actually predators," Gonczar, a gymnast who was treated by Nassar for 15 years, and who estimates that she was molested some 856 times, said.

A number of the women said they had reported Nassar's abuse previously but that the systems of authority, including USA Gymnastics, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Michigan State University, did not take their concerns seriously.

"Absolutely not enough has changed," Gonczar said.

"In the US it's taking so long to just simply get these big institutions to be aware and to be willing to be accountable and transparent, and to have people in the leadership roles that are willing to facilitate that," Gonczar warned.

### **Campus abuse between students ongoing issue**

The University of Michigan finalized a new sexual and gender based misconduct policy in September, but critics say abuse and assault between students and by university staff still isn't being dealt with well enough.

Vaughn said that since he has been protesting, he has been approached by students who have told him of their own experiences of sexual assault and abuse at the university.

There were 157 allegations of sexual assault reported to the University's Office for Institutional Equity (OIE) from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, according to its yearly report.

The University's Division of Public Safety and Security, which records incidents reported to the DPSS, law enforcement agencies and campus security authorities, described 18 on campus rapes and 31 reports of fondling not associated with Anderson in 2020.

Some 106 reports of sexual assault were made to the University's Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) in 2020, down from 151 in 2019 and 168 in 2018.

There were 77 reported instances of sexual harassment and 57 reports of stalking, according to the University's Division of Public Safety and Security, which provided the data as "additional information regarding crime reports on campus."

Campus enrollment in 2019 stood at 48,090 students, and 47,907 enrolled in 2020.

"All the reporting agencies within the university have essentially failed all the students and all the student athletes, because they've done nothing to support in any consistent manner, or protect in any consistent manner," Vaughn said.

"Professors have said if you support or even help report a student's standpoint, it's like a career suicide," he added.

Some 42.4 percent of Michigan students said they had experienced at least one type of harassing behavior since entering school, and more than a quarter (26.9 percent) of undergraduate women reported nonconsensual sexual contact, according to a campus climate survey regarding sexual misconduct.

Out of women who say they experienced harassment, 8.9 percent of Michigan undergraduates reported the person was a teacher, advisor, boss, supervisor, or co-worker compared to an average of 4.8 percent of undergraduates and across the 33 schools surveyed in the overall survey, which looked at responses from a total of 181,752 students from 33 colleges and universities.

Some 31.8 percent of graduate or professional Michigan students reported their harasser to be a teacher, advisor, boss, supervisor, or co-worker, compared to an average 16.5 percent in the overall survey.

The overall survey found that the 33 schools surveyed, more than half of undergraduate women (59.2%) and transgender, genderqueer, and non-binary students (65.1%) reported experiencing at least one harassing behavior.

"I speak to a lot of students, many of them feel like with the assaults that have happened to them, that the university has not been able to deal with it properly," Charlie Kolean, chairman of Michigan Students Against Sexual Assault told CNN.

"Typically, a case will not be criminally referred. And additionally, a lot of survivors from assault, they don't want to go through the university's process reporting the assault, because it is fairly arduous," he added.

Emma Sandberg, a former student and founder of activism group Roe v. Rape told CNN: "Overall, it is very difficult to be a survivor at U of M. The sexual assault prevention center doesn't provide any real resources, university leadership has engaged in sexual misconduct themselves, and those who go through the all-consuming Title IX process are traumatized by it and rarely receive justice, support, or validation.

"We need a supportive center for survivors, not just a preventative one, and we need more effective prevention methods at all levels," Sandberg, who graduated in 2021, said.

In addition to Anderson, at least five current and former university professors and officials have faced accusations of sexual harassment or abuse in the last few years.

In a statement to CNN, Rick Fitzgerald, associate vice president of Public Affairs and Internal Communications at the University of Michigan said: "We encourage every incident of misconduct to be reported and we take action," pointing towards the university's annual report for further details.

"SAPAC has a 30-year history of supporting and advocating for survivors of sexual misconduct, through a range of supportive services, based on individual needs," he said, pointing towards the university's confidential resources for students and staff.

He added: "The University of Michigan always has taken sexual misconduct seriously and we have been increasing our efforts steadily," and that a Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center has been on campus for almost 40 years.

Fitzgerald added that any case that involves criminal behavior is "first turned over to police and the ECRT investigation is put on hold so that criminal activity can always be addressed first."

Vaughn wants the university to overhaul its approach to misconduct.

"You cannot only celebrate parts of your history, you must deal with your entire history in order to root it out and change that culture," he said.

"Because the longer you ignore it, the more you perpetuate it and the more it empowers other predators, because they're watching the lack of discipline, or consequences for serial predators and rapists that then gives others the green light to make those decisions and prey on young men and young women."

Co-lead class counsel attorney E. Powell Miller told CNN his team is seeking "class action relief for reforms, policies and procedures to prevent an Anderson problem from occurring again."

Attorney Jonathan Selbin, co-lead class counsel in a class action suit against the University, told CNN: "While paying money to the victims is a critical first step, U of M must also commit to system-wide changes that bring all of the stakeholders together to reform the campus and institutional culture and prevent abuses like this from ever occurring again."

Vaughn wants the university to create programs that empower students to report instances of sexual violence, and strengthen mechanisms to protect students.

Last July, the university announced revisions to how it will address sexual misconduct, including the creation of a new office with "significant" new resources for support, education and prevention. The office was launched in August.

"I knew that there was nothing that I could do in my protest to change what happened to me. But we could uncover the truth here at Michigan, and also make this place safer for now, and in the future, so that these atrocities don't continue to happen," Vaughn said.

"We want to change the narrative, as well as the culture. So until that's done, I won't be leaving."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Alabama city probes 'policing for profit'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/30/alabama-city-policing-for-profit-brookside">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/30/alabama-city-policing-for-profit-brookside</a>
GIST	<p>Residents of a small <a href="#">Alabama</a> city will on Tuesday hold a town hall meeting to discuss claims by community members and activist groups that local police have pursued excessive policing for profit.</p> <p>Officers in Brookside, a former mining town 20 min outside Birmingham, have been accused of generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in city revenue through ticketing, towing and other traffic-related fines, despite Brookside having no traffic lights and a few two-lane roads, news site <a href="#">AL.com</a> first reported.</p>

With a population of less than 2,000 and a median income of less than \$40,000, in 2020 Brookside generated more than \$610,000 [in fines and forfeitures](#) from drivers, a 640% increase over two years and almost half of city revenue.

Towing ballooned from 50 cars in 2018 to 789 in 2020, with residents reporting that they were required to pay thousands of dollars to get vehicles back.

“Brookside is a poster child for policing for profit,” Carla Crowder, director of the nonprofit Alabama Applesseed Center for Law & Justice, told AL.com. “We are not safer because of it.”

Officers have been cited [in at least five federal lawsuits](#) for manufacturing reasons for traffic stops, “making up laws”, overcharging fines, using racist language and other misconduct allegations, AL.com said.

“This city is a ticking, ticking time bomb waiting to explode,” Juandalynn Givan, a Democratic state representative, told WVTM, an NBC affiliate in Birmingham.

Givan has called on several officials to resign, [including Brookside’s mayor, Mike Bryan](#), and is holding the town hall so residents can air their concerns.

“It’s the wild, wild west, and they created their own wild, wild west,” she said.

On Saturday, Givan did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Despite reporting only 55 serious crimes from 2011 to 2018, with no reports of homicide or rape, the Brookside police department under chief Mike Jones greatly expanded, hiring one officer for every 144 residents. The [average size of a force](#) in Alabama is one officer for every 588 people.

Jones [resigned on Tuesday](#).

Brookside officers also received SWAT training and riot gear, according to residents who said officers parked a riot control vehicle outside the community center.

Issues with Brookside police have been escalating for years, according to several residents, but many have been hesitant to officially pursue complaints given the cost of doing so and difficulty of contesting fines in courts.

“I saw the same attitude in every officer and every person,” Ramon Perez, who tried to fight several tickets in court but ultimately paid the fines, [told AL.com](#). “That’s why I hesitated to fight it. They were doing the same thing to every person that was there. They own the town.”

Crowder said: “This is shocking. No one can objectively look at this and conclude this is good government that is keeping us safer.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 La. governor kept quiet over deadly arrest
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/death-of-ronald-greene-louisiana-arrests-john-bel-edwards-baton-rouge-49d2da5cfdbf4b4185271330a6d79575">https://apnews.com/article/death-of-ronald-greene-louisiana-arrests-john-bel-edwards-baton-rouge-49d2da5cfdbf4b4185271330a6d79575</a>
GIST	BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat in a deep-red state, was immersed in a difficult reelection campaign when he received a text message from the head of the state police: Troopers had engaged in “a violent, lengthy struggle” with a Black motorist, ending with the man’s death.

Edwards was notified of the circumstances of Ronald Greene's death within hours of his May 2019 arrest, according to text messages The Associated Press obtained through a public records request. Yet the governor kept quiet as police told a much different story to the victim's family and in official reports: that Greene died from a crash following a high-speed chase.

For two years, Edwards remained publicly tight-lipped about the contradictory accounts and possible cover-up until the AP obtained and published long-withheld body-camera footage showing what really happened: white troopers jolting Greene with stun guns, punching him in the face and dragging him by his ankle shackles as he pleaded for mercy and wailed, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

The governor has rebuffed repeated interview requests and his spokesperson would not say what steps, if any, Edwards took in the immediate aftermath of Greene's death. "The governor does not direct disciplinary or criminal investigations," said spokesperson Christina Stephens, "nor would it be appropriate for him to do so."

What the governor knew, when he knew it and what he did have become questions in a federal civil rights investigation of the deadly encounter and whether police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers who arrested Greene.

"The question is: When did he find out the truth?" said Sen. Cleo Fields, a Baton Rouge Democrat who is vice-chair of a legislative committee created last year to dig into complaints of excessive force by state police.

The FBI has questioned people in recent months about Edwards' awareness of various aspects of the case, according to law enforcement officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the probe. Investigators have focused in part on an influential lawmaker saying the governor downplayed the need for a legislative inquiry.

The governor's spokesperson said he is not under investigation and neither is any member of his staff.

Edwards kept quiet about the Greene case through his reelection campaign in 2019 and through a summer of protests in 2020 over racial injustice in the wake of George Floyd's killing. Even after Greene's family filed a wrongful-death lawsuit that [brought attention to the case](#) in late 2020, Edwards declined to characterize the actions of the troopers and refused calls to release their body-camera video, citing his concern for not interfering with the federal investigation.

But when the AP obtained and published the [long-withheld footage](#) of the encounter that left Greene bloody, motionless and limp on a dark road near Monroe, Edwards finally spoke out.

Edwards condemned the troopers, calling their actions "deeply unprofessional and incredibly disturbing."

"I am disappointed in them and in any officer who stood by and did not intervene," the governor said in a statement. He later called the troopers' actions "criminal."

This image from video from Louisiana state police state trooper Dakota DeMoss' body-worn camera, shows troopers holding up Ronald Greene before paramedics arrived on May 10, 2019, outside of Monroe, La.

But Edwards, a lawyer from a long family line of Louisiana sheriffs, also has made comments since the release of the video that downplay troopers' actions, even reprising the narrative that Greene may have been killed by a car crash.

"Did he die from injuries sustained in the accident?" Edwards said in response to a question on a radio show in September. "Obviously he didn't die in the accident itself because he was still alive when the troopers were engaging with him. But what was the cause of death? I don't know that that was falsely portrayed."



Weeks after those remarks, a reexamined autopsy commissioned by the FBI [rejected the crash theory](#) outright, attributing Greene's death to "physical struggle," troopers repeatedly stunning him, striking him in the head, restraining him at length and Greene's use of cocaine.

The federal investigators have taken interest in a conversation Edwards had last June with state Rep. Clay Schexnayder, the powerful Republican House speaker who was considering a legislative inquiry into the Greene case following the release of the video.

Schexnayder said this week that the governor told him there was no need for further action from the legislature because "Greene died in a wreck." The speaker said he never moved forward with the investigation to avoid interfering with the federal probe.

The governor's spokesperson acknowledged he briefed the legislative leadership on his "understanding of the Greene investigation" and said his remarks were consistent with his public statements. The U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment.

"It's time to find out what happened, who knew what and when, and if anyone has covered it up," Schexnayder told the AP. "The Greene family deserves to know the truth."

Edwards received word of the Greene case in a text from then-Louisiana State Police Superintendent Kevin Reeves on May 10, 2019, at 10 a.m., about nine hours after the deadly arrest.

"Good morning. An FYI," the message read. "Early this morning, troopers attempted to stop a vehicle in Ouachita Parish. The driver fled thru two parishes in excess of 110 mph, eventually crashing. Troopers attempted to place the driver under arrest. But, a violent, lengthy struggle took place. After some time struggling with the suspect, troopers were joined by a Union Parish deputy and were able to take the suspect into custody. ... The suspect remained combative but became unresponsive shortly before EMS arrived."

The explanation given to Edwards, which his spokesperson called a "standard notification," was far different from what Greene's family says it was being told by troopers at almost the same time -- that the 49-year-old died on impact in a car crash at the end of a chase. A coroner's report that day indicates Greene was killed in a motor vehicle accident and a state police crash report makes no mention of troopers using force.

Reeves ended his text by telling the governor that the man's death was under investigation.

"Thank you," Edwards responded.

Those words were among the few statements from Edwards himself released in response to an extensive public-records request the AP filed in June for materials relating to Greene's death. The governor's office has not released any messages from Edwards to his staff and has yet to fully respond to a separate December request for his texts with three top police officials.

Hundreds of other emails and text messages released by the governor's office show that while he has publicly distanced himself from the case and [issues](#) of state [police violence](#), his staff has been more engaged behind the scenes, including his top lawyer repeatedly contacting state and federal prosecutors about the Greene case.

Alexander Van Hook, who until December oversaw the civil rights investigation into Greene's death as the acting U.S. attorney in Shreveport, said in November there has been no attempt by the governor to influence the investigation. "That wouldn't go over very well with us if there had been," Van Hook told AP.

Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, a Republican, said Edwards had a duty to at least follow up with the head of the state police after being informed of Greene's death.

"When something goes wrong ... he's shocked," Landry said, "when behind the scenes he is intimately involved in trying to control the message and distort it from the public."

Meanwhile, state police recently acknowledged that the department "sanitized" the cellphone of Reeves, intentionally erasing messages after he [abruptly retired](#) in 2020 amid AP's initial reporting on Greene's death. The agency said it did the same to the phone of another former police commander, [Mike Noel](#), who resigned from a regulatory post last year as he was set to be questioned about the case by lawmakers. Police said such erasures are policy.

Edwards' office said the governor first learned of the "allegations surrounding Mr. Greene's death" in September 2020 — the same month in which a state senator sent Edwards' lawyers a copy of the Greene family's wrongful-death lawsuit that had been filed a few months earlier.

No one has yet been charged with a crime in Greene's death and only one of the troopers involved in his arrest has been fired. Master Trooper Chris Hollingsworth, who was recorded saying he "beat the ever-living f--- out of" Greene, [died in a car crash](#) in 2020 soon after learning he would lose his job.

In early October 2020, after [AP published audio of Hollingsworth's comments](#), the governor reviewed video of Greene's fatal arrest, his spokesperson said.

Some observers of Edwards' response to the Greene case see it as partly political calculation. At the time of the deadly arrest, the centrist Democrat was in a tough reelection campaign in a deeply conservative state against a Republican backed by Donald Trump. His path to reelection depended on high Black turnout and crossover support from law enforcement

Greene's death — and the footage that ultimately went viral — would have "politically threatened both voting groups simultaneously," said Joshua Stockley, a political scientist at the University of Louisiana Monroe.

But the first public indications that Greene had been abused did not emerge until months after Edwards eked out 51% of the vote over businessman Eddie Rispone. He won in large part due to massive turnout by Black voters in urban areas, taking 90% of the vote in Orleans Parish, the 60% Black parish that includes New Orleans.

"I find it hard to believe that the release of this video during the election would not have had a profound consequence," Stockley said. "It would have been enormous."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 'High alert': robbery spike pot shops</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/matt-driscoll/article257830428.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/matt-driscoll/article257830428.html</a>
GIST	<p>The details are strikingly similar. Armed robbers enter a pot store, often near closing time, and hold employees and customers at gunpoint while cash and product are stolen. Then they take off.</p> <p>Over the last month or so, according to the state Liquor and Cannabis Board, the Washington Cannabusiness Association and law enforcement officials throughout the Puget Sound region, it's a scenario that's played out with alarming regularity.</p> <p>According to Cannabusiness Association spokesperson Aaron Pickus, a running tally among member businesses puts the number of robberies since mid-December at roughly 30. Many of them have been armed robberies, he said.</p> <p>"It could be higher," Pickus said recently.</p>

While law enforcement agencies from Whatcom County to Tumwater aren't keeping a regional tally of pot shop robberies — and the state Liquor and Cannabis Board had not been provided with the Cannabusiness Association's list, according to LCB spokesperson Brian Smith — most told The News Tribune over the last week that the spike appears real.

"It certainly is a concern of ours," said King County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Tim Meyer, who's department's major crimes unit is currently investigating several recent armed robberies at licensed cannabis retailers. "Anecdotally, I would say yes, I think we're seeing an increase."

The common denominator, according to Meyer and many industry professionals and law enforcement officials interviewed by The News Tribune: cash — and plenty of it. Therein lies the problem.

Almost a decade after Washington voters legalized the sale and use of recreational marijuana, Congress's inability to pass legislation that would normalize banking for cannabis businesses and allow them to accept traditional credit card payment — formally known as the SAFE Banking Act — has effectively put a target on their backs. Overwhelmingly, retail pot is a cash business.

"Certainly, word is on the street that these dispensaries hold a fair bit of cash, and in some cases folks are willing to risk their freedom to get it," Meyer said. "It is a concern of ours, and we really are hopeful that there's going to be a systemic change that's going to let us get in there and fix that."

"We've got to get the cash out of the business," he added.

#### POT SHOPS ON 'HIGH ALERT'

Of roughly a dozen cannabis retail locations contacted by The News Tribune this week, Jennifer Strom was one of the few who responded — and the only one willing to be identified in print.

The owner of Sweet Jane NW near Purdy, that might be because Storm's business hasn't been hit.

Strom has operated Sweet Jane NW since 2016. During that time, she has been the victim of crime; in 2020, two people made off with her ATM machine.

While Strom hasn't been targeted by a serious crime since, she did say she was well aware of talk of a recent spike in armed robberies — even before state Liquor and Cannabis Board Enforcement and Education Division director Chandra Brady issued an advisory bulletin on the problem Thursday.

"I would say everybody in our industry is on high alert," Strom said, indicating that the safety of her 19 employees is her primary concern.

"Everyone is really compassionate in the industry, and they're excited to be in it, but this is like your worst nightmare," Strom continued. "Everyone is just really scared, and we're all trying to look out for each other and beef up our security where we can."

According to Brady, the full scope of recent robberies is something the board is still trying to get its arms around. With so many businesses, so many jurisdictions and so many ways of classifying crimes, it's difficult to get a precise read on the situation and the data, she said. It's also unclear whether the problem is Western Washington specific, she said, or how often weapons have been involved.

"We are certainly hearing from our cannabis retail licensees that they're seeing an increase, and we're currently — from our own work — seeing what appears to be an increase in this activity," said Brady, whose agency has regulator authority of legal marijuana sales. "We're working to make sure that we can provide those licensees with some options to enhance safety at those locations, and to ensure that our officers are prepared with some of those recommendations."

Many local law enforcement agencies appear to be in the same boat.

In Thurston County — where The Olympian’s Rolf Boone has recently reported on recent cannabis store armed robberies — Tumwater Police Lt. Jennifer Kolb and Thurston County Sheriff’s Department Sgt. Chris Packard said the area has experienced an increase in cannabis retail robberies since December, but it’s hard to know what to make of it yet or if the crimes are related.

Packard said the Thurston County Sheriff’s Department is currently investigating three robberies and is working to share information and assistance with law enforcement officials in Lacey and Tumwater working on their own active cases.

Up north, Snohomish County Sheriff’s spokesperson Courtney O’Keefe gave a similar answer, indicating that her department is “actively investigating four robberies at pot shops within the last several months.”

Whatcom County Sheriff’s Department spokesperson Deb Slater said there have been two recent pot shop crimes, one a burglary and one an armed robbery.

In Thurston County, law enforcement is trying to get the word out to local retailers, Packard said.

“We have one detective assigned to our three cases, and we’re also working side-by-side with Lacey and Tumwater on their robbery cases as well. Agencies as far away as Mountlake Terrace are kind of working together trying to correlate. I think we’re kind of taking a regional approach,” Packard said.

Pierce County is one place where a recent uptick in cannabis retail robberies has not been observed, according to law enforcement officials.

Sheriff’s Department spokesperson Darren Moss said the agency hasn’t responded to any crimes of that nature so far this year, while Tacoma Police spokesperson Wendy Haddow told The News Tribune, “We haven’t seen any upticks, per se.”

Even so, Haddow confirmed that officers responded to an armed robbery in progress at Zips Cannabis on South 38th Street on Friday, Jan. 21.

According to Haddow, two armed men briefly entered Zips shortly before 10 p.m. and made off with an undisclosed amount of money and marijuana. Responding officers were able to identify a suspected vehicle leaving the scene and briefly gave chase, Haddow said, but were eventually called off.

The owners of Zips declined to discuss the incident, citing fear and safety concerns.

“A couple of responding officers followed a vehicle that was pointed out by people outside the scene prior to anyone having made contact with the business or victims. They followed the vehicle onto southbound I-5 at a distance waiting for the establishment of probable cause. They were directed back to the scene and never initiated a traffic stop,” Haddow said.

“There were two suspects and nine victims, 10 if you include the business itself,” Haddow added.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUE

Pickus, the spokesperson for the Cannabusiness Association, said there are several steps that could be taken to help keep Washington pot retailers and their employees safe while reducing the likelihood that they’ll be the victim of an armed robbery.

At the state capitol in Olympia, Pickus said, the association is supporting legislation that would increase the penalty for pot shop robberies — making the punishment comparable to pharmacy robberies — and is also pushing for the creation of a law enforcement task force to specifically focus on the problem.

	<p>On the ground, Pickus also said that the Cannabusiness Association is helping distribute information and best practices to local retailers, which often includes guidance on security measures that can be taken, like hiring armed guards.</p> <p>Jacob Bradley is one of those security guards. As the owner of Bradley Public Safety Group, Bradley said his company is currently working with roughly 20 retail cannabis retailers in Western Washington, making up roughly 50% of his business.</p> <p>When discussing the spike in cannabis robberies, Bradley — who also has a background in local law enforcement — said the biggest thing he tries to stress to retailers is the obvious: money and marijuana aren't worth dying for.</p> <p>"Robbers typically want two things: they want cash and products, and they want to get in and out as quickly as possible," Bradley said. "Don't be a hero for property."</p> <p>More broadly, Pickus acknowledged that security measures only go so far, and that cannabis retailers' forced reliance on cash will likely continue to be a problem until federal lawmakers finally address it.</p> <p>Smith, with the state Liquor and Cannabis Board, agreed.</p> <p>"Washington is ahead of many other states, and is probably the nation's leader in access to banking for these businesses. ... However, you can't get past the last hurdles, which are allowing these businesses to allow typical credit card transactions," Smith said.</p> <p>"It's common sense to say that this is a public safety issue that needs to be addressed at the federal level, and they need to do it soon."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Laos big meth bust; 2<sup>nd</sup> huge seizure 3mo.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/crime-asia-united-nations-southeast-asia-mekong-river-dae8acb597eb908785fa469f0f55742d">https://apnews.com/article/crime-asia-united-nations-southeast-asia-mekong-river-dae8acb597eb908785fa469f0f55742d</a>
GIST	<p>BANGKOK (AP) — Police in Laos have made their second huge seizure in three months of methamphetamine, a development that a U.N. expert on the illicit drug trade said Saturday reflects a breakdown of security in Southeast Asia.</p> <p>Jeremy Douglas, the regional representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, said the seizure of 36.5 million methamphetamine tablets in the northwestern province of Bokeo was the region's second largest after 55.6 million meth pills were captured in October in the same province.</p> <p>He warned that the Mekong River region, where the seizure took place, was experiencing a surge of drug production and trafficking that required strong efforts to get under control.</p> <p>"Organized crime treat the Mekong region like a playground — it has all the elements they look for," he said.</p> <p>Lao Security Radio, a state broadcaster, said on its website that four residents of the province were arrested Wednesday in Huay Xai district in a raid that also captured 590 kilograms (1,300 pounds) of crystal meth — also known as ice — a minor amount of heroin and a pistol.</p> <p>Bokeo borders on Myanmar and Thailand, a frontier area known as the Golden Triangle that's infamous for the production of illicit drugs. Heroin and the opium from which it is derived have been joined in recent decades by methamphetamine, mostly produced in Myanmar, especially its Shan state.</p> <p>"Production in Shan is off the charts, and Laos is now a favored gateway for traffickers," Douglas said in an email. Thailand is a major market for drugs from Myanmar, which are also shipped onward to other</p>

	<p>countries. Laos is a poor, sparsely inhabited landlocked country with a reputation for corruption that can facilitate smuggling.</p> <p>Myanmar has been in turmoil since February last year, when the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. It now faces an armed challenge from foes of military rule, disrupting normal law enforcement operations to suppress the drug trade. The situation is further complicated because drug production is often associated with armed ethnic minority groups involved in political struggles with the government and sometimes with each other.</p> <p>“Drugs and conflict in Shan have been connected for decades. But as security has broken down, especially the last eight or nine months, we’ve seen an explosion of supply hitting the Mekong and Southeast Asia,” Douglas said. “Neighbors like Thailand and Laos have been flooded with meth in recent months.”</p> <p>“There are no easy fixes given the governance situation in Shan,” he said.</p> <p>If the region wants to start slowing drug flows out of the Triangle, Douglas said governments need to get a grip on chemical trafficking, secure borders and make it more difficult to launder money.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/29 Long wait for catalytic converter engraving</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/everett-catalytic-converter-event-engraving/281-2e4a593b-8542-4200-95d5-d91dfad32b44">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/everett-catalytic-converter-event-engraving/281-2e4a593b-8542-4200-95d5-d91dfad32b44</a>
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Catalytic converter thefts soared in recent years and now a new bill under consideration at the state level aims to make things a little harder for those looking to sell the stolen car parts.</p> <p>In the meantime, Everett police offered their third catalytic converter theft prevention event Saturday to an overwhelmingly positive response.</p> <p>Students from the Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center spent the day engraving catalytic converters to deter thieves from taking them.</p> <p>Organizers said drivers began lining up before 7 a.m., three hours before the event started.</p> <p>The line wrapped around the building and up another side. There was also an overflow line waiting on the street. Car after car, the drivers patiently waited for hours in the hopes of getting their catalytic converters engraved and marked.</p> <p>Constance Jones said she came to a previous event but got turned away because the line was so long.</p> <p>“I’m just glad I’m doing something,” Jones said.</p> <p>Jones learned about catalytic converter theft the hard way when she became a victim last summer.</p> <p>“I’ve learned my lesson, I’ll do anything to prevent that from happening again,” she explained.</p> <p>Jones said every repair estimate she received was around \$2000. After numerous calls, she found a mechanic with an after-market part that she was able to get for just under \$800.</p> <p>“I’m retired, you know? This was not in my plan in the least but I had to have it done,” Jones said.</p> <p>Jones was grateful for the event at Sno-Isle TECH Skills and said she brought a book to read as she passed the hours in her car.</p>

	<p>“Certain cars, like Priuses, and other cars are very highly sought after when they're searching for a cat to steal,” student Nathan Heimbeigner explained. Heimbeigner was part of the crew at the school that brought cars in the bays, lifted them in the air and then marked them up to prevent theft.</p> <p>The students engraved the converter with part of the car’s VIN, spray painted the part and then added a sticker to show it’s part of the anti-theft program.</p> <p>“By doing this we're hoping the scrap yard will turn them away because of a VIN carved into it,” Heimbeigner said.</p> <p>The legislature is also looking at changing state law to make the stolen parts harder to sell and setting up a task force for the problem.</p> <p>Constance Jones says something needs to change to protect car owners like herself. “This is no fancy car, it's an old Prius,” she said. “But somebody made some money off of it, unfortunately.”</p> <p>The Everett Police Department is trying to plan more events and looking for more partnerships. They will announce the next one on their social media page.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/29 Portland reports 7 shootings in 24hrs</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/portland-records-seven-shootings-within-24-hours/XZUWATSVCAJJH3KIB5HOJSOYY/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/portland-records-seven-shootings-within-24-hours/XZUWATSVCAJJH3KIB5HOJSOYY/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. — Following a “concerning surge” in shootings in Portland, Oregon, police say that they are “deploying additional resources” this weekend.</p> <p>KOIN 6 <a href="#">reports</a> that within 24 hours — between Thursday and Friday afternoon — there were seven reported shootings in Oregon’s largest city. So far this year there have been at least 89 shootings, 21 people have been injured by gunfire and seven have been killed in Portland.</p> <p>Of the shootings on Thursday and Friday, at least one person died.</p> <p>Several others had been injured, including a business owner who confronted an alleged burglar and a man who was shot in the leg in a grocery store parking lot on Friday afternoon.</p> <p>The surge in shootings follows a year of a record number of homicides in Portland.</p> <p>In 2021 the city recorded 90 homicides amid a surge in gun violence, shattering the city’s previous high of 66 set more than three decades ago.</p> <p>Last year, the number of homicides in Portland surpassed more populous cities such as San Francisco and Boston — and more than double the number of slayings last year in its larger Pacific Northwest neighbor Seattle.</p> <p>Killings have been on the rise in Portland for the past few years. From 2019 to 2020, Portland had a sharper rise in killings — an 83% increase — than nearly all major cities. Nationally, homicides had increased by nearly 30% in the same time, based on FBI data.</p> <p>City police and officials say last year’s increase — which disproportionately impacted Portland’s Black community — was fueled by gang-related arguments, drug deals gone awry and disputes among homeless people. In addition, the situation was exacerbated by the pandemic, economic hardships and mental health crises.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/29 Chinatown-ID businesses crime concerns</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/chinatown-international-district-businesses-worried-about-crime-are-moving-out-of-seattle">https://komonews.com/news/local/chinatown-international-district-businesses-worried-about-crime-are-moving-out-of-seattle</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - More businesses are packing up and leaving Seattle because of crime concerns in their neighborhood. In Chinatown-International District, some owners say they are frustrated by the repeat break-ins, drug use, and homelessness.</p> <p>Early Friday morning, there was another violent incident reported. A man was found shot to death by Kobe Terrace Park in Seattle's Chinatown-International District. Detectives are investigating.</p> <p>On Friday, many business owners in the C-ID were just getting word about the latest homicide in the area.</p> <p>They say the shootings, the stabbings, the drug use, and also what they see at the corner of 12th Avenue and Jackson in the C-ID have created major headaches and concerns.</p> <p>Dong Thap Noodles is just across the street from the trouble spot.</p> <p>Owner Nick Bui says his business has been broken into several times. Some of the incidents were caught on camera.</p> <p><a href="#">Bui told KOMO News last month</a> that because of those repeat break-ins, his insurance coverage wasn't renewed. Bui has decided to leave Chinatown-International District and move to Southcenter Mall in Tukwila.</p> <p>Bui believes more businesses in the area will follow suit and leave the neighborhood and that the crime problem is only going to get worse.</p> <p>"It's not safe for my staff, it's not safe for my family being here," said Bui. "I have given up hope. I don't believe there's going to be any changes within the year or two from now and I have no choice but to move."</p> <p>Viet Wah grocery store is just around the corner from Dong Thap Noodle.</p> <p>"We've been here for over 30 years. It's really sad to see it turn into this," said Leeching Tran, V.P. of Viet Wah Group. "It's sad to hear that our neighborhood is losing businesses but at the same time, we understand why they're doing it. Because we see the problems firsthand."</p> <p>Many business owners like Bui and Tran are pushing for changes from Seattle's new administration.</p> <p>"Mayor Harrell has said this neighborhood is a top concern for him. So, I hope he keeps his word and will actually pay attention to what's happening and take some action to fix things," said Tran.</p> <p>Bui says he wants clear answers.</p> <p>"I want a concrete plan in which they can solve this problem," said Bui. "Give us some sort of hope where they can make a difference here. Do something, shelters, or whatever you have to do. You cannot have so many people loitering around where they set up tents around business around here," said Bui.</p> <p>KOMO News checked in with Seattle Police about the crime problem. They say they've increased patrols in the C-ID and that the area of 12th and Jackson is getting extra attention.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell was unavailable for an interview. His office released this statement: "For local businesses, uncertainty and disorder must be replaced with safety and support. Throughout his first month in office, the mayor has been working with the Seattle Police Department on a plan to take action, hold offenders accountable, clean up the streets, and reset norms in the neighborhood."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 India record payout to sex abuse victims
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/asia/india-shelter-sexual-abuse.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/asia/india-shelter-sexual-abuse.html</a>
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — Survivors of a particularly grim corner of India’s welfare system have been awarded thousands of dollars in compensation, a national human rights body announced this week. More than four dozen former residents of a homeless shelter for girls in north India endured horrific conditions; many were sexually assaulted.</p> <p>Shelters for women and girls, which typically house victims of domestic abuse or sex trafficking, along with those who have run away from home or been kicked out by their families, are notoriously overcrowded, squalid and often dangerous.</p> <p>But the case involving the shelter in the north Indian state of Bihar, which paid the compensation, was particularly striking because of the number of victims. Over a period of years, 34 of them were raped by shelter employees and officials of the state welfare department, according to the police. At least one was as young as 10; the oldest was 19.</p> <p>An independent auditor’s 2018 report revealing the scope of the abuse at the shelter, in the city of Muzaffarpur, prompted national outrage. Federal investigators opened an inquiry that resulted in the conviction of 19 people, including the shelter’s director, Brajesh Thakur.</p> <p>In 2020 they were found guilty of offenses ranging from negligence of duty to gang rape. Twelve of the defendants, including Mr. Thakur, received life sentences.</p> <p>It is not the first time that states have compensated victims of sexual abuse at government-licensed shelters, but it is the largest case so far, both in the number of victims and the size of the payouts. It signals a partial reckoning with the government’s responsibility amid an epidemic of sexual violence in India, even as other high-profile cases are prompting demands for judicial reform. The same year that the Muzaffarpur case surfaced, the nation’s Supreme Court established national guidelines for government compensation to other victims of sexual violence in the state’s care.</p> <p>All of the 49 girls who had been living in the shelter in 2018 received compensation, as had been the recommendation of the National Human Rights Commission, an autonomous body that opened its own investigation into the case. They were awarded between \$4,000 and \$12,000 apiece, according to a statement released this week by the commission.</p> <p>The abuse was uncovered in 2018 during the Bihar government’s first independent audit of its social welfare institutions.</p> <p>The Muzaffarpur shelter, which housed runaways and other destitute girls picked up by police in Bihar, was located in Mr. Thakur’s family compound, next to his three-story home and his father’s printing press. Residents were kept on the windowless top floor of a decrepit building. Windows on the lower floors had bars on them.</p> <p>It was one of many such shelters outsourced by the Bihar government to private contractors. The auditor, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, reported that abuse was rampant throughout the state’s shelters, but singled out the Thakur one as particularly bad. It was notable for “carrying out sexual violence on the girls, all of a tender age and from marginalized backgrounds, in the name of punishment and discipline,” the audit said. “The girls reported that they were molested by the male staff on a regular basis.”</p> <p>The auditors also noted that conditions at the shelter were “extremely deplorable,” that the residents were locked in their wards except for meals and that they had no access to open space or opportunities for recreation.</p> <p>The shelter opened in 2013, but it is not clear whether conditions there were better earlier in its history.</p>

	<p>Many former residents testified in court that they were routinely raped and physically assaulted by shelter staff as well as by child welfare department officials. They described being beaten with sticks or scalded with hot water for such offenses as asking for food or resisting sexual abuse.</p> <p>Among the state welfare officials convicted in the case was Rosy Rani, an assistant director, who was accused of failing to notify the police or in any other way responding to the victims' complaints. She served a six-month prison sentence, and is now contesting the termination of her government job.</p> <p>After the audit, a state welfare department officer filed a complaint with police. Protesters demonstrated in Patna, Bihar's capital, and in New Delhi. Thirteen welfare officers were suspended, and the state's social welfare minister was forced to resign.</p> <p>The victims, none of whom could be reached for comment this week, scattered after the Muzaffarpur shelter was closed when the trial began. (It was later demolished.)</p> <p>Three of them went to another shelter for women and girls run by a Christian charity in Patna. There, a 16-year-old victim who provided testimony to the police also spoke to The New York Times in 2018.</p> <p>"Brajesh sir raped me. Repeatedly. He would rape me twice, sometimes thrice a week. If I dared resist, I would be beaten up black and blue," said the girl, whom Indian law prohibits from being identified.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 'Tiger King' resentenced to 21yrs prison</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/tiger-king-joe-exotic-resentencing/507-e373880b-c0c8-48ce-b537-d290ded4b035">https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/tiger-king-joe-exotic-resentencing/507-e373880b-c0c8-48ce-b537-d290ded4b035</a>
GIST	<p>OKLAHOMA CITY — A federal judge resentenced "Tiger King" Joe Exotic to 21 years in prison on Friday, reducing his punishment by just a year despite pleas from the former zookeeper for leniency as he begins treatment for early-stage cancer.</p> <p>"Please don't make me die in prison waiting for a chance to be free," he tearfully told a federal judge who resentenced him on a murder-for-hire charge.</p> <p>Joe Exotic — whose real name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage — was convicted in a case involving animal welfare activist Carole Baskin. Both were featured in Netflix's "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."</p> <p>Wearing an orange prison jumpsuit, Maldonado-Passage, 58, still had his trademark mullet hairstyle, but the bleach-blond had faded to brown and gray.</p> <p>Baskin and her husband, Howard Baskin, also attended the proceedings, and she said she was fearful that Maldonado-Passage could threaten her.</p> <p>"He continues to harbor intense feelings of ill will toward me," she told the judge.</p> <p>Baskin said even with Maldonado-Passage in prison, she has continued to receive "vile, abusive and threatening communications" over the last two years. She told the judge she believes Maldonado-Passage poses an even more serious threat to her now that he has a larger group of supporters because of the popularity of the Netflix series.</p> <p>Maldonado-Passage's attorneys told the judge their client is suffering from stage-one prostate cancer, along with a disease that compromises his immune system, making him particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.</p> <p>Stage-one prostate cancer means it has been detected early and hasn't spread. Maldonado-Passage previously said that he planned to delay treatment until after his resentencing. Federal officials have said</p>

Maldonado-Passage will need up to eight weeks of radiation treatments and would be unable to travel during the treatments.

His attorney Amy Hanna told the judge he's not receiving the proper medical care inside the federal prison system and that a lengthy prison sentence is a "death sentence for Joe that he doesn't deserve."

Prosecutors also told the judge Friday that Maldonado-Passage received a disciplinary write-up in September for being possession of a contraband cellphone and unauthorized headphones that was not included in his pre-sentencing report. Palk added that Maldonado-Passage had four previous disciplinary write-ups, although he described those as "relatively minor and not violent."

Friday's court proceedings came about after a federal appeals court ruled last year that the prison term he's serving on a murder-for-hire conviction should be shortened.

Supporters packed the courtroom, some wearing animal-print masks and shirts that read "Free Joe Exotic." His attorneys said they would appeal the resentencing and petition for a new trial.

"The defense submitted a series of attachments that showed excessive government involvement in the creation of the offense for which he's been convicted," attorney Molly Parmer told reporters after the hearing.

"We are going to continue our post-conviction litigation, but we did preview for the court the evidence we have through our post-conviction investigation."

The former zookeeper was sentenced in January 2020 to 22 years in prison after he was convicted of trying to hire two different men to kill Baskin. A three-judge panel of the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with Maldonado-Passage that the court should have treated them as one conviction at sentencing because they both involved the same goal of killing Baskin, who runs a rescue sanctuary for big cats in Florida and had criticized Maldonado-Passage's treatment of animals.

Prosecutors said Maldonado-Passage offered \$10,000 to an undercover FBI agent to kill Baskin during a recorded December 2017 meeting. In the recording, he told the agent, "Just like follow her into a mall parking lot and just cap her and drive off." Maldonado-Passage's attorneys have said their client — who once operated a zoo in Wynnewood, Oklahoma, about 65 miles (105 kilometers) south of Oklahoma City — wasn't being serious.

Maldonado-Passage, who maintains his innocence, also was convicted of killing five tigers, selling tiger cubs and falsifying wildlife records.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Tacoma buildings hit in drive-by shootings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-police-investigate-drive-by-shootings-that-damaged-four-buildings">https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-police-investigate-drive-by-shootings-that-damaged-four-buildings</a>
GIST	<p><b>TACOMA</b> - <a href="#">Tacoma Police</a> are investigating several drive-by shootings that damaged buildings across the city. Detectives are working to track down a shooter and motive.</p> <p>"Drive-by bullets can hit anyone at any time when they occur. So, our police department obviously is very concerned," said Officer Wendy Haddow, public information officer for <a href="#">Tacoma Police Department</a>.</p> <p>Investigators said the shootings began Tuesday when shots were fired into a <a href="#">Tacoma Police Department substation</a>. On Wednesday, a Tacoma Public Library building and Tacoma Fire Station 7 were hit. On Thursday, Bass Pro Shops was also struck.</p> <p>Haddow said, fortunately, no one was hurt in any of the shootings.</p> <p>Crews at <a href="#">Tacoma Fire Station 7</a> were inside and heard the gunfire.</p>

"They ducked for cover, not sure what was going on," said Allyson Hinzman, of Tacoma Fire Department. "Some bullets landing just briefly away from where our crews sit, eat dinner, workout."

As if the fire department wasn't stressed enough-- this week, firefighters have been putting out [multiple arsons across the city](#), with the drive-bys putting some crews at greater risk of serious harm.

"Not only are people in danger, but it could hurt resources that we need. We know our fire department has been busy now. Now is not the time for [fire department personnel to have to worry about their own safety](#) in their building or that their property is being damaged," said Haddow.

Though the fire station and two other city buildings were hit by gunfire, Haddow said it's too early to tell if the shootings were random or targeted. Hinzman said the fire station has had many problems with violence before.

"It's very concerning to us because unfortunately, in this neighborhood this fire station has been targeted. Over the last couple years, we've seen an increase in violence with homelessness, with other aggressive individuals attacking both our personnel, our apparatus," said Hinzman. "We've had crews attacked here, we've had crews threatened, assaulted. We've made many requests from the city to protect the station with it being in such a main street."

Investigators are reviewing surveillance video from all locations. Detectives are working to determine if the drive-bys involve one shooter or more.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Jobless fraud loss likely unrecoverable?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/much-of-states-unemployment-fraud-loss-likely-wont-be-recovered/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/much-of-states-unemployment-fraud-loss-likely-wont-be-recovered/</a>
GIST	<p>It took a matter of weeks for criminals to <a href="#">steal nearly \$650 million in state and federal jobless benefits from Washington</a> during the chaotic opening stages of the pandemic in 2020.</p> <p>It has taken almost two years for the state to recover around \$380 million, or nearly 60% of those funds. And while that recovery percentage appears to put Washington well ahead of other states hit by similar fraud, newly disclosed state data and recent court cases suggest that much of what Washington hasn't recovered won't be retrieved.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the state Employment Security Department disclosed the banks and other financial institutions where the agency had sent \$577 million, or around 90%, of the fraudulent benefits it paid on thousands of bogus unemployment claims in the spring of 2020. (The other 10% were spread among several thousand other banks, state officials say.)</p> <p>The banking data, provided after several requests by The Seattle Times, offers a glimpse into the financial mechanics of a multibillion-dollar crime spree that <a href="#">blindsided Washington</a> and other states — and <a href="#">delayed benefits to tens of thousands of Washingtonians</a> left jobless by the pandemic.</p> <p>The list shows that criminals sought to have benefits wired to tens of thousands of accounts at institutions ranging from JP Morgan Chase, the largest U.S. bank, which was sent \$42.5 million in allegedly stolen ESD funds, to Washington's own Boeing Employees Credit Union, which was sent nearly \$1.2 million.</p> <p>Even KeyBank, the Cleveland-based bank that handles ESD's financial transfers to other financial institutions, apparently wired itself about \$18.3 million in allegedly stolen ESD benefits, state records show.</p> <p>As important, the list details just how much of that money has come back, and where missing funds might still be found.</p>

A little more than half of that \$577 million sent to the 75 financial institutions has been returned to ESD, voluntarily, by banks, agency records show.

But while more funds are potentially retrievable, additional recoveries could stretch out for years, and are likely to generate significantly smaller returns, state and federal officials say.

Much of what the state has recovered [came back relatively quickly](#). In some cases, federal investigators were able to warn financial institutions to refuse suspicious benefits transfers from ESD and to return the funds to KeyBank. In other cases, suspicious ESD transfers appear to have tripped the financial institutions' own fraud-detection systems, leading them to freeze suspected accounts. All 75 institutions have returned some portion of the transfers, state records show.

Early recovery efforts also benefited from the existence of a veritable fraud mother lode: Nearly half of the recovered funds came from Green Dot, an Austin-based prepaid debit card company, which has returned around \$182 million of the \$266 million ESD sent it, according to state records.

Going forward, the pickings will be much slimmer. The state Attorney General's Office is focusing on 37 of the 75 financial institutions that are believed to still have ESD unemployment benefits in thousands of accounts used by suspected criminals, according to ESD and the state attorney general's office.

But financial institutions typically won't turn over deposits without a court order and a complicated legal process known as forfeiture — in part to avoid getting sued by account holders, banking officials said. That has required the attorney general's investigators to, among other things, document that funds in each of thousands of suspect bank accounts were fraudulently obtained from ESD.

There's no shortage of evidence: on many suspect bank accounts that received unemployment benefits, for example, the account holders' name, Social Security number and other data don't match what's on the unemployment claim. ([The investigations are sure to resurface questions](#) as to why so much [public money](#) was sent to accounts with so many red flags.) But the investigations are also time-consuming. So far, the attorney general's office has filed three forfeiture actions.

One big question — how much retrievable money remains in all 37 financial institutions — won't be clear until the forfeiture cases are completed, according to ESD and the attorney general's office. But the three cases filed so far suggest the total could be relatively small.

Last week, for example, the attorney general's office filed a forfeiture action in King County Superior Court for \$6.7 million in allegedly stolen unemployment benefits at JPMorgan Chase. That follows a case against [Wells Fargo](#) in December for \$7.4 million and one against and New Jersey-based [TD Bank](#) in October for nearly \$500,000. Wells Fargo was sent \$42.9 million in suspect benefits from ESD, state records show; TD Bank was sent around \$6.2 million.

All three banks say they'll comply with the court order. A JPMorgan spokesperson said the bank was "eager to return the money" once the legal process concludes. State officials say they have no reason to expect any of the banks will fight any court-ordered forfeiture.

But that only highlights a bleak fact of fraud in the digital age. Even banks eager to return suspect funds can't send back what they no longer have.

Even after JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo and TD Bank comply with the forfeiture orders, nearly two thirds of the \$91.7 million in fraudulent funds initially sent by ESD to these three banks will be missing, and could well remain that way, according to state records and state officials.

In the case of TD Bank, the attorney general's office acknowledged in October that the missing funds — about \$4.2 million — were probably withdrawn by scammers before the suspect accounts could be frozen. Asked whether outstanding funds sent to Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase Bank also were likely



withdrawn, Dan Jackson, spokesperson for the attorney general's office, said it was "fair to say the same assumptions likely apply, but we are in different stages of investigation on each bank."

If those assumptions hold, that means about 80% of the unrecovered funds are no longer at those three banks.

It's not yet clear whether that percentage will hold up for the rest of the 37 financial institutions, state officials say. "Each individual bank investigation will ultimately determine what is recoverable through these forfeiture actions," Jackson said.

But if the current percentage holds, it's possible that about \$210 million, or around a third of the total theft from 2020, is no longer at those financial institutions.

Recovery efforts will continue even after forfeiture, state and federal officials say. Funds that are no longer at the banks may be the target of separate federal investigations, officials in the attorney general's office have said. "We are really dedicated to trying to get back every dollar we can," said ESD spokesperson Nick Demerice. "But it will be a lengthy process."

However, state and federal officials also acknowledge the difficulty of tracking down withdrawn funds. Even in the cases where federal investigators have identified suspects — such as [two Nigerian citizens charged in the ESD fraud](#) — stolen funds often have been moved in ways that make them difficult to retrieve.

"Law enforcement has been able to trace some funds moving to financial institutions overseas, but much of the money is withdrawn from domestic bank accounts and laundered in many complex ways," said Emily Langlie, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Seattle in a recent emailed statement.

These include "the purchase of luxury goods or vehicles that are then shipped overseas, conversion to cryptocurrency, or the funding of debit cards or gift cards to quickly disperse the stolen funds," Langlie said.

Private fraud experts also aren't optimistic about recovering withdrawn funds.

Unless criminals transferred the withdrawn funds to other traditional financial institutions, "the money is gone," warns Jason Kratovil, a fraud expert at SentiLink, which provides anti-fraud and identity verification services to financial firms.

In the case of funds stolen by suspected fraud rings from other countries, "you have to assume that a lot of those funds are overseas now," Kratovil said.

Still, in purely financial terms, Washington may have gotten off relatively lightly.

Michigan, for example, paid out \$3.9 billion to fraudsters, according to the federal [Pandemic Response Accountability Committee](#). California paid out \$20 billion, according to media accounts.

All told, states' unemployment fraud losses during the pandemic may account for a "significant portion" of the \$87 billion of the "improper" unemployment payments that federal officials have projected for the pandemic period, according to a Jan. 3 [summary](#) by the U.S. Labor Department's Office of the Inspector General.

Washington, which was among the first to be hit by the fraud, also appears ahead in recoveries.

Labor Department officials were unable to provide an official estimate of how much of the unemployment benefits stolen nationally during pandemic have been recovered.



	But the summary by the Labor Department's Office of the Inspector General notes that it has recovered or helped states and other federal agencies recover just \$790 million in fraudulent unemployment benefits.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/28 Juvenile facility: 28 escapees since 2012</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/1-of-5-teens-who-escaped-from-juvenile-facility-near-snoqualmie-caught/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/1-of-5-teens-who-escaped-from-juvenile-facility-near-snoqualmie-caught/</a>
GIST	<p>Three of the five incarcerated teenagers who <a href="#">escaped from the Echo Glen Children's Center near Snoqualmie on Wednesday morning</a> were arrested hours apart on Thursday, with two of the teens arrested on Kent's East Hill and the third in Kirkland, according to the King County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>After the Sheriff's Office posted the name and photograph of a 15-year-old Burien boy on Twitter on Wednesday evening, tips led detectives to a Chevron gas station and McDonald's restaurant in the 10700 block of South 240th Street, in Kent, said Sgt. Tim Meyer. The boy, who <a href="#">shot and killed a stranger two years ago</a>, was arrested without incident at 1:30 a.m. on an escape warrant with help from uniformed Kent police officers, he said.</p> <p>The teen is now in custody at the King County Child and Family Justice Center in Seattle. He is expected to make his first court appearance related to his escape on Friday.</p> <p>The Seattle Times typically does not name juveniles accused or convicted of crimes unless they are prosecuted in adult court.</p> <p>Around 3:15 p.m. Thursday, Kent police arrested one of the teenagers, but details about his apprehension were not immediately made available. The third teen was taken into custody just before 5 p.m. in Kirkland. As with the arrest of the 15-year-old, both arrests came about as a result of tips from the community.</p> <p>Two teenagers and a state-owned 2018 gray Ford Fusion were still missing as of 6:30 p.m. Thursday, according to the Sheriff's Office. Anyone with information about their whereabouts is asked to call 911.</p> <p>The five boys, ages 14 to 17, serving sentences for various felonies, attacked staff members and escaped from Echo Glen around 7:45 a.m. Wednesday in the Ford Fusion, a state pool vehicle. Two of them had escaped before, Meyer said.</p> <p>Aside from the five teens who fled Echo Glen this week, nearly two dozen people have escaped from the rehabilitation center since 2012, with at least one escape occurring each year during that span, according to a spokesperson for the state agency that oversees the facility.</p> <p><b>28 escapees since 2012</b></p> <p>On Thursday, an Echo Glen employee told The Seattle Times that management has told staff members not to discuss Wednesday's escape with the media.</p> <p>"But sometimes things have to get out before they get better," said the employee.</p> <p>The employee, who asked not to be identified for fear of being fired, said one woman was on duty at the maximum-security Klickitat Cottage, where at least 10 youths were being held Wednesday morning.</p> <p>The group of escapees, one of whom had found a knife in the cottage that had been left by an employee, "slashed her and beat her up," the employee said. The teens also overpowered a nurse who later arrived, taking his wallet and keys to the motor pool car he'd driven to the cottage, and attacked a third staff member "who was coming in as they were rushing out," the employee said.</p> <p>The teens drove the motor pool car down the main road on campus and through a checkpoint staffed by an employee at the main entrance, which has been rendered unobstructed for months since the front gate was broken last year, the employee said.</p>

Witnesses later reported seeing occupants of the stolen car tossing out orange detainee clothing and that the car nearly struck another vehicle as it headed onto Interstate 90 westbound, the employee said.

The escape is just the latest among multiple instances in which youths detained at Echo Glen have fled the facility, the employee added.

“I saw one of the news stations saying that this was only the fourth escape, and it made me just shake my head and laugh,” the employee said. “There’s been at least one or a few [escapes] every year.”

Most of the escapes have involved one or two residents and most never come to the public’s attention, the employee said.

In an email Thursday, Jason Wettstein, the spokesperson for the Department of Children, Youth and Families — the state agency that oversees Echo Glen — provided an accounting that confirmed the employee’s statement. It showed that 28 individuals, including the five teens this week, have escaped from Echo Glen since 2012.

In all, there have been 15 escape incidents from Echo Glen — with at least one escape every year — since 2012, the accounting provided by Wettstein shows.

Many of the escapes “involve youth making it to the entrance road or surrounding woods and no further,” Wettstein said. “Many were recovered very quickly.”

Wettstein did not provide an answer Thursday as to why the main entrance gate, which has been broken since April, hasn’t yet been repaired. He noted a request has been made to fix it, and added the gate isn’t a security gate nor meant to be “a primary means to keep youth in the facility.”

“It opens automatically as people drive up,” he said in the email. “The replacement gate will not be a residential gate, but a higher security option.”

#### **“A dangerous place”**

Escapes from the facility are just one of the ongoing safety concerns facing Echo Glen staff members that need to be addressed, according to the employee.

“One guy got stabbed not too long ago, another guy had this huge kid wrapped around his neck and was getting choked out,” the employee said. “So it’s not a secret to us: This is a dangerous place.”

Exacerbating the situation, the employee said, is a high turnover rate among the staff.

“We’re underpaid and understaffed,” the employee said.

As of Thursday, Wettstein said, there were 69 youth residents at Echo Glen and 146 employees.

Wettstein added that before the escape, the Department of Children, Youth and Families had planned to undertake “a full security and operations audit” at Echo Glen “to address security challenges.”

Since this week’s escape, the agency has increased security checks and taken several other additional safety measures at Echo Glen, Wettstein said. He also detailed a number of other security measures, including metal detectors at entry points and automatic locking doors, that have been implemented over the years.

“We cannot speak today on what factors played a role in this incident,” Wettstein said in his email Thursday. “We have assembled a critical incident team to address risk immediately and determine the root cause.”

HEADLINE	01/28 Tacoma police: arrest in string of arsons
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article257828883.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article257828883.html</a>
GIST	<p>Tacoma police arrested a 42-year-old woman Friday afternoon who they suspect of being a serial arsonist who started more than a dozen fires throughout the city Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning.</p> <p>The woman was arrested at a residence in Tacoma without incident and booked into jail, the Tacoma Police Department said in a news release. Police did not specify charges.</p> <p>“Multiple facets of our department were focused on these arsons in an effort to get a suspect in custody before someone was hurt,” department spokesperson Wendy Haddow said.</p> <p>Tacoma Fire investigators have been looking into 11 fires set in one night in Tacoma that were suspected to be arson and one fire set in Ruston the same night suspected to be arson.</p> <p>Most of the fires were set in Central Tacoma and northern areas of the city at residential structures with people inside. No one was injured in the fires.</p> <p>And on Thursday, Tacoma police said investigators were looking into three more suspicious fires. Those fires, however, were set in much different areas of the city and did not target structures with people inside.</p>
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